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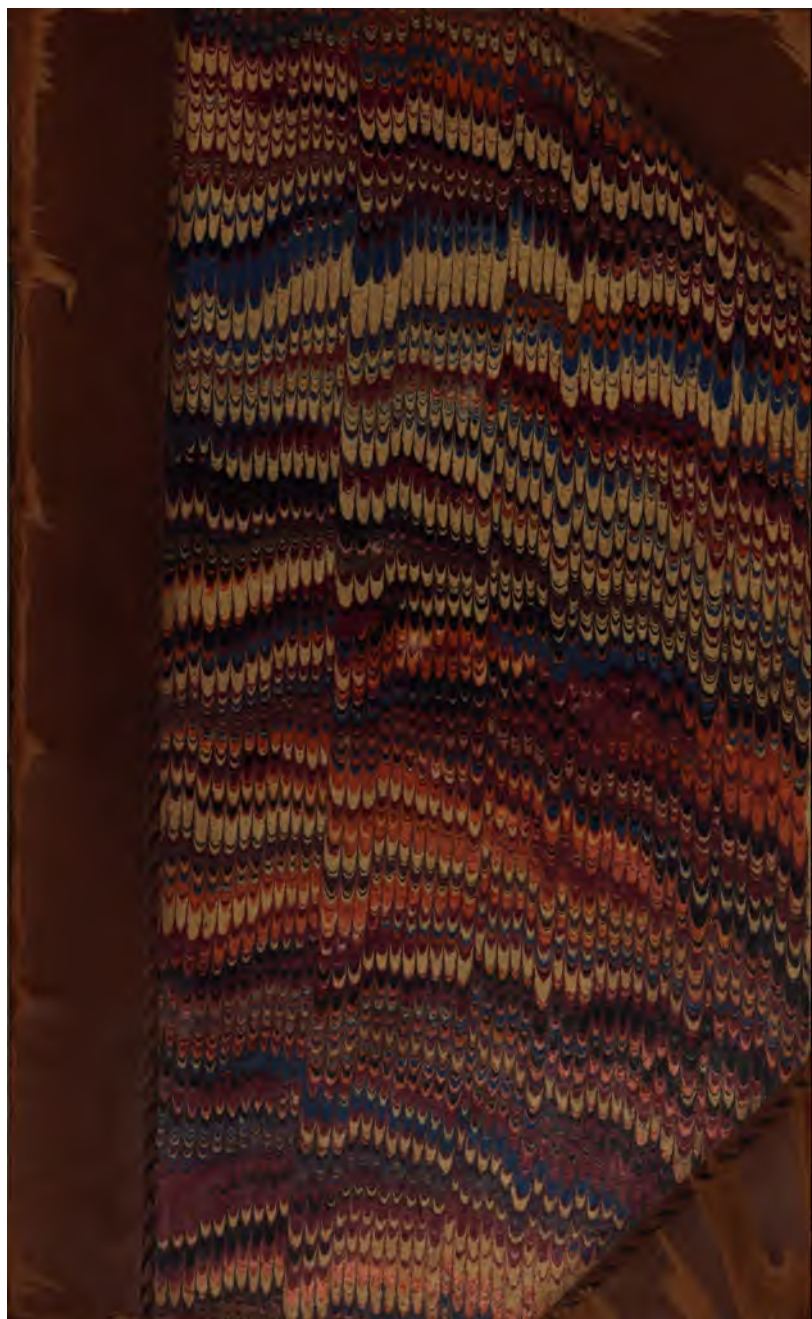
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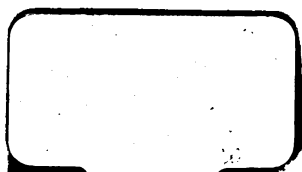
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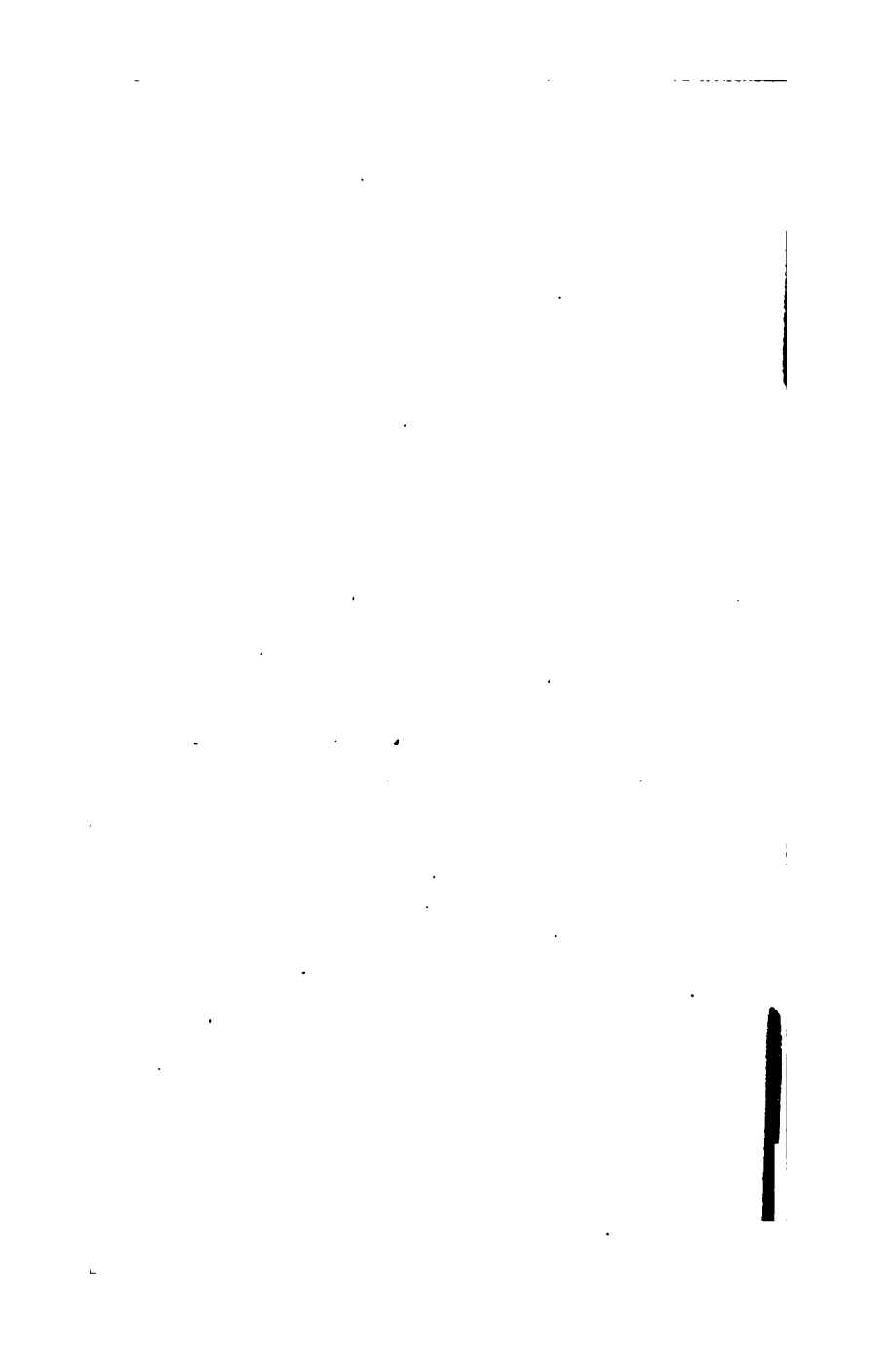
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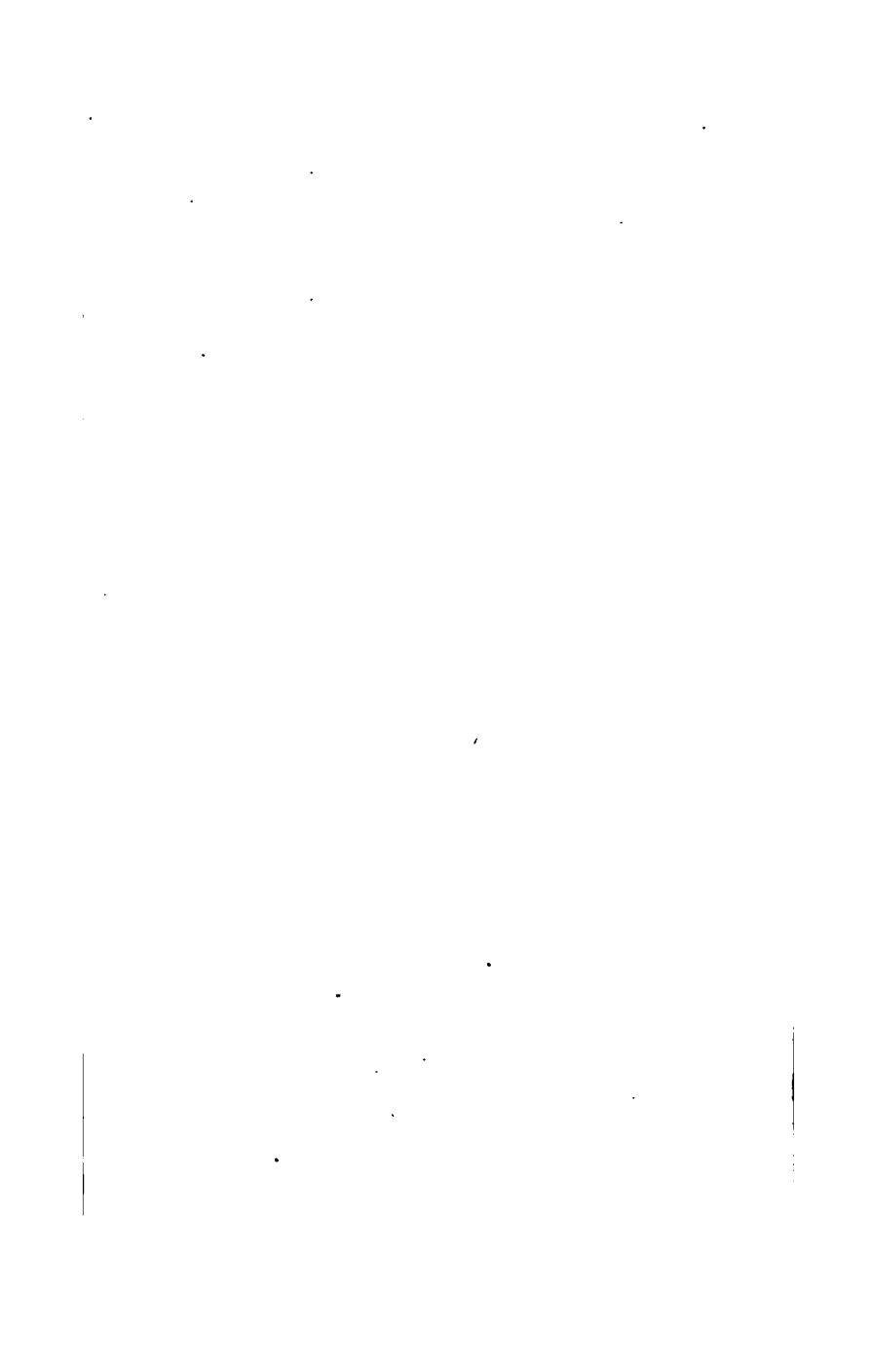
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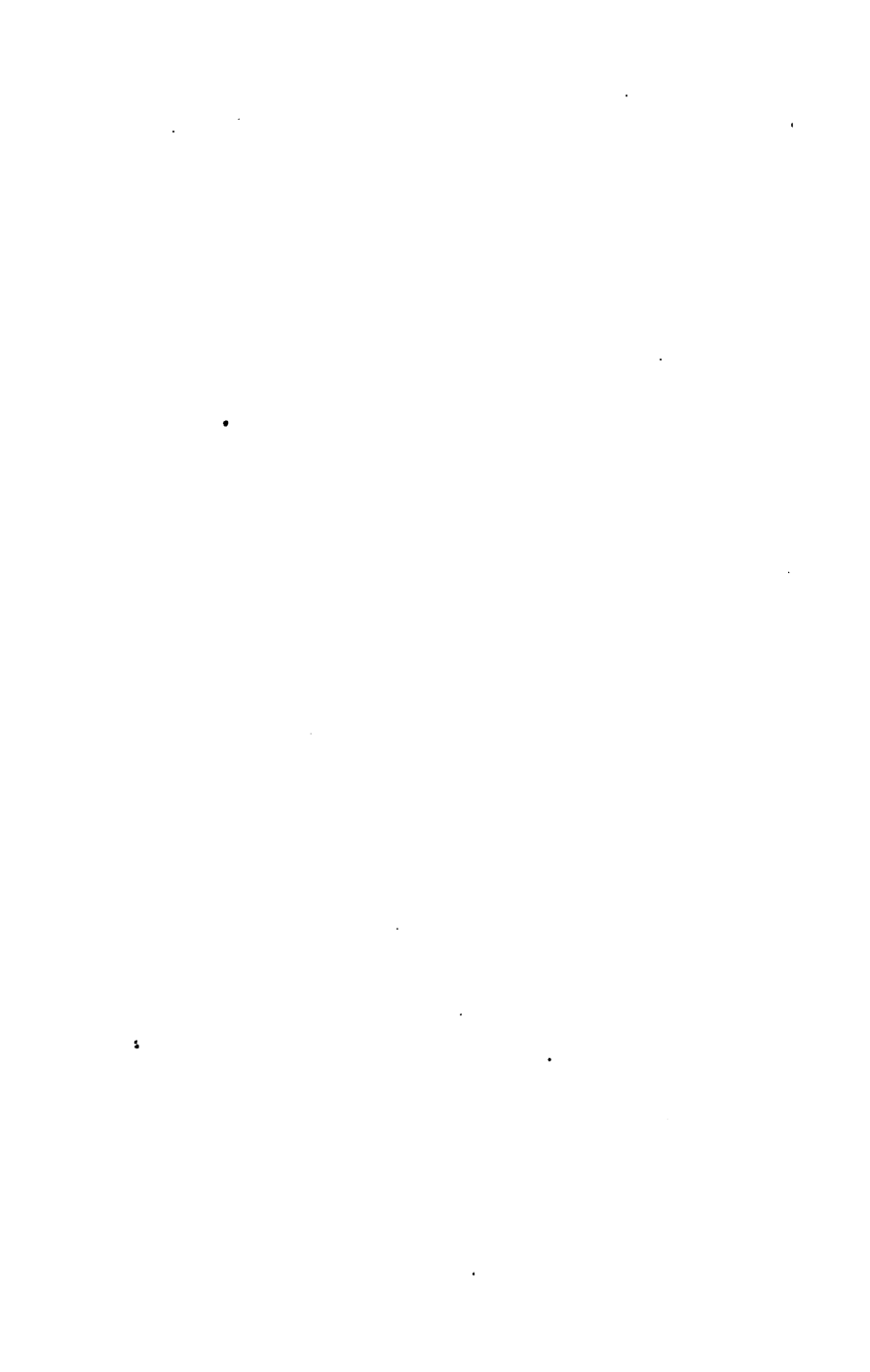
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STRAFFORD.

A Tragedy.

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A Tragedy.

BY



JOHN STERLING.

LONDON:

EDWARD MOXON, DOVER STREET.

MDCCKLIII.

8/13

LONDON:
BRADBURY AND EVANS, PRINTERS, WHITEFRIARS.

Dedication.

TO

RALPH WALDO EMERSON.

Teacher of starry wisdom high serene,
Receive the gift our common ground supplies;
Red flowers, dark leaves, that ne'er on earth had been
Without the influence of sidereal skies.

J. S.

VENTNOR, ISLE OF WIGHT,

Midsummer Day, 1843.

PERSONS.

LORD STRAFFORD.

KING CHARLES I.

ARCHBISHOP LAUD.

LORD KEEPER FINCH.

BISHOP JUKON, Lord High Treasurer.

MARQUIS HAMILTON.

LORD NORTHUMBERLAND.

LORD COTTINGTON.

LORD HOLLAND.

JERMYN, Master of the Horse to the Queen.

GORING,

WILMOT,

POLLARD,

ASHEBURNHAM,

PERCY,

} Officers of the
Army.

LORD BEDFORD,

LORD SAY.

PYM.

HAMPDEN.

ST. JOHN.

FIENNES.

VANE the Younger.

HOLLIS.

LADY CARLISLE.

QUEEN HENRIETTA MARIA.

MARY PYM.

EVERARD,

CAPTAIN MORLEY,

RANDAL,

PATTERSON,

} Gentlemen
attached to Lord
Strafford.

HUMPHRY PATCH.

MUCKLE JOHN, the King's Fool.

ARTHUR, Page to Lady Carlisle.

Lords.

Courtiers.

Citizens.

Gentlemen.

Attendants.

Guards.

Women.

&c.

STRAFFORD.

ACT I.

SCENE—*A Room in Lord Strafford's House in London.*

Enter CAPTAIN MORLEY *and* EVERARD *meeting.*

EVERARD.

Good Captain, say how goes the night with the soldiers ?

MORLEY.

'Tis warmer than in Ireland.

EVERARD.

Right, brave Captain !

We know the word agreed on.

MORLEY.

And I trust

You come to free me from this pestilent watching.

I fain would be abed ; 'tis now past Four.

EVERARD.

I cannot free you from your guard, but we

Will watch together.

MORLEY.

Sir, you seem to know me :

May I not learn your name ?

EVERARD.

Our Lord of Strafford,

Whom we both serve, esteems you, Captain Morley,
A man of courage and discretion, tried
By years of practice in the German fields,
Where men by diverse modes of serving Heaven,
Were mettled to fierce hatred of each other.
And during these three months that you have been
Employed in London, on my Lord's affairs,
Your zeal and faithfulness have earned his favour,
Ample when won, as gold-mines duly wrought.
Thus here in his own house, where you have lived
Of late, there is among his special servants
Not one he counts on more assuredly.

MORLEY.

Lord Strafford's favour is a rich reward
Of my poor service. You, sir, speak securely,
As one to whom his Lordship's mind is known.

EVERARD.

Brave Captain, though we have not met before,

You being busy with my Lord's concerns
In London here, and I about his person
In Yorkshire and in Ireland, yet perhaps
You know the name of Master Everard ?

MORLEY.

My Lord's most valued follower ! I am happy
To see the face of one whose worthy fame
Is dear to all the Lord Lieutenant's friends.

EVERARD.

Thanks for your courtesy, which in men of war
Is valour's plummy crest. Know you this matter ?

MORLEY.

Thus only. Our great Master sent me word
Enjoining me to watch this livelong night,
Till some one should appear with that same token
You gave but now, and should entrust to me
A packet sealed, that like my own heart's blood
I must preserve until Lord Strafford's hands
Receive it from me.

EVERARD.

I am sent in haste
That little suits my years or peaceful nurture,
Riding all night to help, not end your guard,

And see that no mischance may interrupt
Your heed of your instructions : Haste to stop
A coming ill, the hurry being itself
Bad birth of foregone evil.

MORLEY.

Yet my Lord
Might have relied on an old soldier's care.

EVERARD.

I also but obey his Lordship's orders.
He whom we serve will have his bidding done,
Or know the reason : reason being with him
Both mill, at once, and corn. How 's London now—
I fear not quiet ?

MORLEY.

Sir, the Parliament,
Which, by the beard of Tilly ! meets to-day,
Has mischief and confusion in its name :
A Parliament, a place for parleying,
As if not fight, but parley were men's work.
The world is full of muttering and medley,
And each vile serving-man, and callow prentice,
Nay, purblind grandams, and raw sampler girls,
Discourse of points of State as shrewishly,

As if 'twere but the scandal of the parish.
And then the upturned eyes, and doleful phrases,
—"God and his gospel"—and "the idolatrous bishops"—
And ending always with a sanctified curse
Upon the craft and ruthlessness of Strafford.

EVERARD.

If curses killed long since were earth unpeopled.
The wishes of the sober citizens,
Whose coin-stuffed bosoms have no room for dreams,
Count more with me than frenzies of the mob.

MORLEY.

They're ten to one against us—hang their sobriety !

Enter Messenger.

MESSENGER.

Good friend, you speak too loud for times of danger,
When walls have ears, and babblers may lose theirs.

MORLEY.

Let hands guard heads.

MESSENGER.

How goes the night with soldiers ?

MORLEY.

'Tis warmer than in Ireland.

MESSENGER.

Then I'm right :

And who, brave sir, is this in converse with you ?

EVERARD.

My name is Everard.

MESSENGER.

Master Everard,

Where is your Lord ? I fain would see himself.

EVERARD.

I left him after sunset sixty miles off,
Bowed down and racked with pain, and so compelled
To journey with less speed than his quick spirit
Would else have prompted. But before high noon
He doubtless will be here ; and I meanwhile
Will keep with utmost heedfulness the packet,
Whate'er it be, that you should bring for him.

MESSENGER.

'Twere better I should see himself.

EVERARD.

So be it ;

And would you, sir, put off that weighty cloak
In which you wrap yourself so closely round,
Warding all eyes as if their glance could stab,
Then might we—

MESSENGER.

Thank you, friend ; it is my way
To wear my cloak and hat except when sleeping.
(*Sits down, as do the others.*) Make fast the house till
comes the Lord Lieutenant,
Nor open it to any violence.

MORLEY.

Please you, why need we thus expect a siege ?

MESSENGER.

It does not please me ; 'tis not in my warrant
To answer questions.

EVERARD.

Captain, do his bidding.

[*Exit MORLEY.*]

Precaution brings no danger save to fools.

MESSENGER.

My Lord, you say, was suffering when you left him ?

EVERARD.

Ay, sir, we all must suffer, and the greatest
Perhaps the most. Impartial Providence
Gives no one strength without a fitting load.
Hark, now the storm is rising. All the night
The skies have threatened, and the waning moon
Toiled like a skiff amid a sea of clouds,

That whirled their huge and flying waves about it,
And often drowned it quite. Pray Heaven it be not
An image of the weak and battered State !

MESSENGER.

My fear is more for Strafford than for England.

EVERARD.

The Lord Lieutenant ruling Ireland,
Lieutenant General and Chief Commander
Of the King's Armies, and Lord President
Of York and all the North, can hardly fall,
Unless the kingdom's greatness perish too.
He is the laurel garland of the Realm,
Which will not pluck him off save in death-frenzy.
But still his wisdom may secure the whole :
The body's faintness, not the mind's, impedes him ;
No one but he would travel as he is,
And he'll be here by noon. [*Violent knocking outside.*

Why, how is this ?

[*Both start up.*

'Tis well the door is fast.

Enter MORLEY hurriedly.

MORLEY (*to the Messenger*).

Good gentleman,

As you command us, will you give the word

What we must do ? *[Knocking repeated.]*

MESSENGER.

Look out before you open.

.

[Exit MORLEY.]

EVERARD.

I pray 'tis not a warrant from the Speaker.

MESSENGER.

Great Heaven forbid ! *[Sinks on a seat.]* But no, it
cannot be,

They only meet to-day ; he is not chosen.

[A loud noise, during which enter STRAFFORD attended.]

MESSENGER.

Lord Strafford here !

EVERARD.

What ! here, my Lord, already ?

STRAFFORD.

Each moment of delay, good Everard, wrung me

Worse than the sharpest pain of flesh and bone.

What noise was that I heard ?

MORLEY *(entering)*.

In the great entry, where upon the walls

Are hung arms antlers pennons, the elk's horns

That came from Ireland, four full cloth yards wide,

Head of a monstrous long-forgotten beast,
Fell in the moment when your Lordship entered,
Plumb on the floor.

STRAFFORD.

Well, as one rises high,
Some things must fall, to keep the great world's balance.
Why is my house thus barricaded up ?

EVERARD.

This gentleman, my Lord, would have it so.

MESSENGER (*still cloaked and covered*).

I've brought, my Lord, a message for your ear,
And only yours.

STRAFFORD.

So——. All is well, I trust ?

MESSENGER.

All excellent well.

STRAFFORD (*to the Attendants*).

Here take my cloak and hat,
And leave the room all but this gentleman.

[*Exeunt Attendants, leaving the cloak and hat upon a chair.*

*The Messenger, throwing off the disguise, is seen to be
the COUNTESS OF CARLISLE in man's clothes. STRAF-
FORD and she look at each other. He kisses her hand.]*

The Countess of Carlisle ! Is it a vision !

Dear Lady, well I see you're still the same
Fantastic brave and beautiful thing, to whom
Five summers since, and woe is me ! five winters,
I vowed my poor devotion.

LADY CARLISLE.

Ill kept vow !

But no, I'm not the same. I have become
A freakish impudent page, in hose and doublet,
And while I wear this garb I feel, my Lord,
A certain masculine dulness of the brain,
And faithlessness of heart creep over me.

STRAFFORD.

That were indeed a miserable change,
For one so quick and flaming. But, dear Lucy,
Run you not too much risk in these sour times,
From this unpuritanic change of sex ?

LADY CARLISLE.

Pooh ! Votes of Parliament, and long-eared preachers,
Are all too weak to thwart a woman's will.
Eve had her way in spite of Heaven itself,
And so will I have mine. Besides, my Lord,
You know there breathes not upon earth a man
Who has the right to say to Lucy Percy,

Do this—or, Do it not. I was a widow
Before you loved me, and I am so still
When loved no more, still free from all dominion.

STRAFFORD.

In truth, dear Lucy, we meet strangely thus.

LADY CARLISLE.

In me the dress is changed, the heart in you.

STRAFFORD.

Ah ! Lucy, sickness racking all the body,
And the worse fever of the o'erlaboured mind,
Still spinning silken threads to bind and knot
The broken cables of a shipwrecked kingdom,—
'Tis this ill-fatedness must bear the guilt
Of all my head's gray hairs, my soul's gray ashes.

LADY CARLISLE.

I wot of other cables, lambswool vows,
And gossamer oaths, that also need repair.
Is there no silk-thread left to cobble these ?

STRAFFORD.

Lady, believe me that I loved you truly,
Still think of you with wonder and delight,
Own you the liveliest, noblest heart of woman
This age, or any, knows ; but for love-ditties,

And amorous toys, and kisses ocean-deep,
Strafford and this old Earth are all too sad.

LADY CARLISLE (*aside*).

How much more passion has his coldness in it,
Than all the blustering sighs of softer men.
(*To him*) Think you I looked for these? No Wentworth, no!
You read me better. I may jest and smile,
And you look stern and groan ; but in my lightness
Is honester truth than in a thousand saws
Of moral bombast. I am faithful still
To what we both were once, and you a traitor.

STRAFFORD.

We loiter while each moment 's big with years
Of strange event. I only looked to find
Some papers, or at most a messenger—
And you are here yourself, a fair exchange.

LADY CARLISLE.

I doubt but you had rather found my tidings,
Than her who brings them. Yet I must not chide ;
You seem fatigued and troubled.

STRAFFORD.

Tush, 'tis nought !
A hurried ride by night, and in foul ways,

Through bands of puritan petitioners,
Crowding to London, each with a remonstrance
Against some tax or patent, parish-priest
Or bishop, and against Lord Strafford—all !
The grim and bloody Lord beloved by none.

LADY CARLISLE.

In truth by few, but then by these more truly
Even for their fewness. But I think, my Lord,
We have at last succeeded. In these papers

[Shows a packet.]

Is proof of all.

STRAFFORD.

Proof, say you ! Proof, dear Lady,
Against these traitors ? What, then, England's safe—
The king is safe, the government and laws,
And Strafford too is more than safe, triumphant !
Lucy, can this be true ? Is there no flaw,
Loophole, exception, wide equivocal phrase
That can untrap them ?

LADY CARLISLE.

None—nothing—not one.

'Tis sure as statute laws, or lovers' vows.

STRAFFORD.

Quick, let me see it ; Lucy, quick. *[She gives the packet.]*

LADY CARLISLE.

'Tis here :

Their own handwriting set to their own purpose.

STRAFFORD (*runs over the papers, fixes on one, and reads it*).

Villains—the smooth deep traitors—why, this beats

Imagination !—They 'll make Parliament

As fixed in England as a king or nobles—

Fixed as a kite on a barn-door ! They 'll have

The head of Strafford—let them guard their own ;

'Twill not be child's-play. Yes ! we 've here their hands—

Their plain, unblushing signatures—each letter

Is a pure diamond—no, a bloodred ruby,

Set in King Charles's crown. Hampden and Pym,

Say, St. John, Fiennes, young dream-drunken Vane,

All plotting downright treason with the Scotch,

Asking an army to invade the realm,

As if they only begged a cast of falcons

For a day's hawking. Ay ! we'll show them sport.

Lady, 'twill do—'twill do—the proof is good, "

Solid and sharp, an axe to lop their heads.

You have my heart's whole thanks, my warmest truest,

Not spiced with boyish love, but pure from words

That mix and muddle all the young man's feelings.

Tell me where got you these ?

LADY CARLISLE.

I must not say.

What if I coaxed, and flattered, smiled, and cozened,
And let a roundhead snuffle in my ear
That I'm as fair as Solomon's beloved ?

STRAFFORD.

Nay, if you jest I've done. I had five agents
All largely paid to gain by any means
These papers for me, which I owe to you.
How goes the world since last you wrote to me ?

LADY CARLISLE.

O ! still it talks and tosses in its sleep,
And dreams as usual that 'tis wide awake.
'Tis darkly rumoured that the Parliament
Would break their fathers' tombs, therewith to stone
The only man they condescend to fear :
And 'tis most sure the Scotch Commissioners
Are come, like hungry wolves from their snow mountains,
To tear in pieces their worst enemy.

STRAFFORD.

I own I love not insolent beggary,
Nor fraud and hatred shouting—Gospel ! Gospel !

LADY CARLISLE.

The Court still shifts, and splits, and fluctuates,

And wisest he who least relies upon it.
Therefore, I ask why, Strafford, did you come ?

STRAFFORD.

This hour, dear Lucy, proves I have one friend
Who makes me strong against a thousand foes.

LADY CARLISLE.

Alas ! it seems that all must end in ill,
For one inextricably bound to those
As rash and faithless as the King and Queen.

STRAFFORD.

I have received the King's express commands
That I would straightway join him here in London :
And in plain words he wrote, " While I am king
No man shall touch a hair of Strafford's head."

LADY CARLISLE.

'Tis well—'tis very well.

STRAFFORD.

Say out, what spoken
Will lose its deadliest import.

LADY CARLISLE.

'Tis but this :

'Twere better if upon the scroll which pawns
The King's own honour for your life, you read
The names of Henrietta and of Jermyn.

STRAFFORD.

Nay, Lucy ; what could any subject's hand,
What could the Queen's and her gay favourite's warrant
Have added to the sovereign's own decree ?

LADY CARLISLE.

Nought to his power, but to his firmness all.
She governs him, and Jermyn governs her,
Helped now and then by Holland's valorous wisdom.

STRAFFORD.

You utter plainly what the silent hearts
Of millions think. I hope a better end ;
And in my thought the promise of success
Grows to the self-same stature as the need,
Which is gigantic. There's a king to guide,
Three realms to save, a nation to control,
And by subduing to make blest beyond
Their sottish dreams of lawless liberty.
This to fulfil Strafford has pledged his soul
In the unfaltering hands of Destiny.
And now farewell. Before the Council meets
I have to do the work of many days.

LADY CARLISLE.

One word remains to speak. Northumberland,
My brother, though the Lord High Admiral,

And strong in seeming favour, meets with much
From the Queen's influence, that he brooks but ill.
Her lover Jermyn, and her counsellor Holland,
Sway as they please her insufficient soul.
She rules in turn her blind uxorious lord,
Who, like a coat of mail with velvet lined,
Hard to all others, is wool-soft to her.
Her friends have intercepted many graces
Northumberland had asked, and now the State
Offers much matter to a wavering mind ;
And thus the earl hangs doubtful of his course
Between the King and Commons. He has power
That it were well to win on our behalf ;
And here the King is master, for the earl
Would fain make secretary in the Exchequer
His kinsman, Lionel Percy.

STRAFFORD.

What ! the bald one
Who fought the duel,—he whose right leg limps ?

LADY CARLISLE.

The same. He must turn penman now. Do this,
And you will bind my brother yours.

STRAFFORD.

I'll do it.

LADY CARLISLE.

Farewell, my Lord, my friend ! If none but I
Are faithful, yet believe not I shall fail.

STRAFFORD.

Lucy, farewell, and take my blessing with you.

[*Exit* LADY CARLISLE.]

Ho ! Everard, accompany this gentleman.
How wise a wit, at home upon her brow,
Plays in the tangles of that long dark hair !
How bright a spirit fills those ardent eyes !
What choice and honeyed words and keen delights
Bloom in the laughing summer of her mouth,
While the fair soul looks out in every motion,—
An airy sweetness breathing from a flower !
With her, in heartfelt quiet and deep joy,
I might have 'scaped the storms of fatal years.
And now—O ! fool—time presses—Everard,
Here, haste, call in the secretaries all,
And come yourself. Speed, there is much to do.

Enter EVERARD.

EVERARD.

My Lord, this moment Captain Rook is come
Straight from the army, and with long fatigue,

And violent ill-usage on the road
At hands of Puritans, can scarcely speak ;
But 'mid his fainting sighs and broken words,—
For his despatch was robbed from him by force,
This side of Royston, by that furious crowd,—
I learnt that, when he left, one regiment
Was in full mutiny.

STRAFFORD.

A regiment !

That is too much. No doubt 'twas Goring's men,
Seven hundred and eighty strong, as I remember.

EVERARD.

They clamoured for their pay, had seized their colours,
And threatened that next morning they would march
To join the Covenant camp. 'Twas greatly feared
That the whole army would break out with them.

STRAFFORD.

Rook told you nothing more ?

EVERARD.

He was too weak.

I left him swooning, and the surgeon now
Cares for the bruises and the several wounds
That these petitioning fellows on the road
Gave him to mark their hatred of your lordship.

STRAFFORD.

Enough. We will repay them soon. Now write
At my dictation to Lord Conway, thus :

[EVERARD *writes.*

“ My Lord, upon receipt of this despatch
Take straightway from my quarters all the plate
You find therein, and turn it into coin.
Deal privately with some few leading men
Among the mutineers. Win them by money ;
Then summon all the body to lay down
Their arms within a quarter of an hour.
If they refuse, as handled thus they will not,
Charge home upon them with three regiments,—
Ogle’s, I think, and Grandeson’s, and Glenham’s,—
Whose men you must secure by gifts and praise.
Do this, and send me word of your success,
Or I much fear the king will hold your head
The unequal forfeit of your lordship’s failure.”

EVERARD.

It is the ancient household plate of Wentworth,
Some dating from the wars in Palestine.

STRAFFORD.

No matter. There’s no time for thoughts like these ;

[*Signs the paper.*

It is the wars in England that concern us.
Send Morley off with this upon the spot.
Bid him, if he should fall in evil hands,
Destroy the paper as he tends his life :
And let him read it now, that he by word
May tell my pleasure to that idle Conway.
He 'll find fresh horses left at Huntingdon.
Let him begone from hence within five minutes.

[*Exit* EVERARD.]

[*Enter two Secretaries, who seat themselves at one side of a table; STRAFFORD sits opposite them. EVERARD returns and places himself at the farther side of the table.*]

STRAFFORD.

Everard, it is your part to write whate'er
Is needed for the council-board to day ;
You, Randal, what requires despatch for Dublin ;
And Patterson, for York and all the North.
First, Everard, of the army. State the force
In horse and foot, who the chief officers,
And what the quarters of each regiment.
All this you know ; if not, inquire of me.

[*EVERARD writes.*]

Randal, begin a full despatch in form
To the vice-treasurer and board in Dublin ;
And say—I know men's minds in Ireland

Are shaken much with many vain reports
Of hindrances, that slacken the King's service
In England here ; and especially, that some
Pretend the Parliament, which meets to-day,
Is laggingly affected tow'rds the Crown.
But say—the Lord Lieutenant is assured
These are but muddy fumes in doltish brains ;
And Ireland may put faith in his clear knowledge,
That all, except some foolish brawling gulls,
Are strong in loyal duty and true love.
Yet, could it even be otherwise, the King
Has strength and wisdom to restrain the bad,
And holds the sword of justice firm, and ready
To strike the sheer inevitable blow. [RANDAL *writes*.
It is your business, Patterson, to write
To the Lord Conway, General of the Horse,
And, in my absence, of the King's whole army ;
And say, with commendation of his zeal,
That yet it somewhat lacks the full effect,
From vile infusions of distrust and coldness
Among his men. Say that I marked some rust,
Not on the weapons only, but the spirits,
Even of the troop that were my proper escort ;
And bid him sharply lesson all who fail

In any trifle of commanded service. [PATTERSON *writes*.
Everard, why stops your pen ?

EVERARD.

My Lord, I know not—
Plague on my brain—where lies the last artillery
You sent from Ireland ?

STRAFFORD.

Four guns at Wakefield,
Waiting for orders from the King : and say
They want more powder, and are weakly horsed.
Go on from this to state, in your report
Meant for the King himself, what evil thoughts
And pestilent words ooze from the Covenant camp
Even to our own, and over all the North.

[EVERARD *writes*.

Why pause you, Randal ?

RANDAL.

I, my Lord—I—please you—
Remember not exactly what you said
Of the King's justice.

STRAFFORD.

Why, besotted knave !
Your ears are only fit to be lopped off
By hangmen's knives ; that were the King's true justice.

Write that the sword of doom is firm and ready,
Hung over heads that least expect the blow.
Why, man ! you cannot write ; your hand is shaking
As if that sword were trembling o'er your head.

RANDAL.

Ah—alas !—pardon—forgive me, my dear Lord ;
But while you spake, I saw the dreadful blade
Waving in darkness right above your brow.

STRAFFORD.

Pooh, you 're gone mad ! out of my house, you dotard !

RANDAL.

My Lord, I 've ridden hard and fasted long.

STRAFFORD.

True, friend ! I spoke in haste. I feel it too,
And crave your pardon. Only do your best.

[RANDAL writes.]

ATTENDANT.

My Lord, a gentleman, at least in voice,
Knocks at the door, and sturdily demands
To speak at once with Master Everard,
On matters of great import to your Lordship.

STRAFFORD.

Everard, give me your paper ; I 'll go on

Where you left off, and tell me who 's the stranger :
Before you hold more converse.

[STRAFFORD writes. *Exit* EVERARD and Attendant,
Patterson,

You stop : then add, that whatsoe'er is said
Of parliaments, and treaties, and disbandments,
I do assure Lord Conway that the King
Is like to have much need of all his soldiers :
And if among them Scottish spies are found
Pushing the Covenant, and plotting treason,
'Tis my command that such be hanged at once
Upon the first sufficient English oak.

Enter EVERARD.

EVERARD.

My Lord, I crave a moment's private speech.

[STRAFFORD rises and comes forward with him.

I do believe, nay I am sure, the voice
Which asks for me is that of Master Hollis.

STRAFFORD.

My dead wife's brother, and a leading man
In these new popular counsels ! Bring him in ;
Speak with him here ; let him not know I 'm come.
But how can this be managed ?—Stop—for I
Must hear his purpose ; it may serve me much.

O ! then, hark Everard, that despatch-box key,

[EVERARD *gives the key.*

Give it, and heed me well. [*Whispers, then aloud.*] We
must be sudden.

Now go. Detain him but some moments there
Till all be ready. [*Exit EVERARD.*] Patterson, remove
Those papers, and my cloak and hat ; and, Randal,
'Tis now broad day-light, set the candles down
Upon the table there in the alcove,
And leave the hangings drawn. Ay, so 'tis well.
Now both begone, and mark ye, at your peril,
Let no one learn that I am come to London.
Go, break your fast, and so we 'll write again. [*Exeunt.*

[STRAFFORD *unlocks the despatch-box on the table, and takes
out a black mask, which he puts on, and sits down as to write,
in Everard's place. The light of the morning is still weak.*

Enter HOLLIS and EVERARD.

EVERARD.

That gentleman now writing at the table,
An officer of my Lord's, received such wounds
In the late Scottish war, upon his face,
He cannot yet uncover it ; and you see
He wears a mask : but such esteem is his
With my Lord Strafford, all that I might hear
May no less freely be addressed to him.

HOLLIS.

Ay, sir, I only wish your Lord himself
Could catch my counsel through a thousand ears :
And ears for him to hear with shall I hold
This gentleman and you, his faithful friends.
But if I use small ceremony with you,
Charge it upon the occasion, not on me.

[STRAFFORD *continues seated at the table.*

EVERARD.

Your courtesy, sir, is more than I deserve.
I'm here but as a servant of his Lordship ;
And his most reverend regard of you
Binds me your servant also. 'Tis the spirit
No less than law of my Lord Strafford's life
To outdo the love of those who love him.

HOLLIS.

Also,

Perhaps the hate of those who hate him. Briefly,
I have some friends among the ruling heads
Of this new Parliament,—men to whose hands
The weal and woe of England are intrusted :
Nor will their stewardship fail for lack of zeal.
They hold,—and here my judgment leaps with theirs,—
Lord Strafford as the deadliest enemy
Of England's freedom, laws, and Parliament.

EVERARD.

Alas! you much mistake him, sir.

HOLLIS.

We must not

Debate this now. But thus condemning him,
Yet for the love of one who loved him well,
Who long has rested in the quiet grave,
My best of sisters, his true wife, I would not
Behold him perish, as he surely must
If he confronts the Parliament. Send you
Swift words and weighty, saying this from me.
I will not bid him turn his steps from London ;
Bold as he is he dares not venture here.
But if he lingers in the bounds of Britain,
Nay if in Ireland, where he strode so long
Free as a ploughman o'er a nest of ants,
The hate, alas ! the righteous hate of England,
Will smite him down as lightning strikes the boor
On the dark field. The Scotch commissioners
Are here, and peace between the king and them
They swear must needs be signed on Strafford's grave ;
While far and wide from every English hamlet
Swells the fierce cry for Strafford's hunted head.

EVERARD.

I shall make true report of all you say.

HOLLIS.

Is he at York, or has he fled by sea ?

EVERARD.

Last eve at Huntingdon I left my Lord,
Sore travel-wearied, aching with the gout
In all his limbs ; and his physician's counsel
Much urged him there to stop, nor travel on
Tow'rd London for some days.

HOLLIS.

Travel tow'rds London !

O ! Master Everard, ride yourself, ride fast
As if the fiends of hell had all broke loose—

EVERARD [*aside*].

I think they have, and you 're in league with them.

HOLLIS.

And chased behind you. Tell my Lord how Death
Gapes for him here, nor all King Charles's power,
Were he quite sure he could command it all,
Would e'en delay the inexorable moment.
The Queen, moreover, in affairs of state
Relies on no one's counsel but Lord Holland's ;
And how he hates my brother, and how she
Puppets the King at will, is known to all.
Then say, good sir, to him you serve—the uncle

Of those poor children whom my sister left,
Asks—if her memory be not quite rased out
From his too busy brain—if their young smiles
Shall not be turned to lifelong shame and sorrow,—
That he'll go back, and at some safe retreat
Wait till at least he see with what new flood
The waters of destruction rise against him.
Thus may there still be hope that, though bereft
Of power, and wealth, and honour, he may creep
Into some foreign hermitage, and live.
Such is my message. On your life be speedy,
Faithful and urgent with him, or he dies.

EVERARD.

I will deliver it with the self-same zeal
With which you speak it now.

HOLLIS.

Farewell! Heaven speed you!

[*Exit HOLLIS. STRAFFORD starts up, and throws away the mask.*]

STRAFFORD.

So Everard, think ye they don't fear me now?
Surely in vain the fowler's net is spread
In sight of any bird. A sage device
Of my good brother and his hot compeers,
To frighten Strafford from the field of battle

Before a sword is drawn ! I trust that yet
They'll find me wasting their pale ranks with slaughter,
And grinding their rebellion into dust.
And if I went, would not my coward flight
Uplift their fainting courage to the stars ?
And in their politic pleadings 't would be sworn
Self-conscious fear already proved me guilty ;
When all my guilt is but the staid resolve
To save my country from their bungling knives.

EVERARD.

He spoke, my Lord, with a well-acted passion,
If it was feigned, not real. Him I hold
Too kindly true, too slightly self-possessed,
To vent mere falsehood with so seeming faith.
No halfness was there, no deliberation ;
All without art poured headlong ; and the eye
Boldly met mine, and yet without the trick
Of fraud's o'eracted steadiness.

STRAFFORD.

No doubt ;
The prick-eared brethren who would win the earth
By whine and rant and babblement of Heaven,
Keep excellent schools for training hypocrites,
Where the foul fiend wears a Geneva gown :

No wonder they whose life is all deception,—
A piety that, like a sheep-skin drum,
Is loud because 'tis hollow,—thus can move
Belief in others by their swollen pretence.
Why, man, it is their trade ; they do not stick
To cozen themselves, and will they stop at you ?—
I have to go and wait upon the King,
And so must make myself a gallant courtier,
If dress can do it. For the Queen and Holland—
He whispers I am fallen, and she receives
The lie, and verges tow'rds the utterer.
Let her but fancy I can win the day,
And crush the serpents of her flowery field,
Then I shall be her darling and her sage,
And Holland but a loathed ill-omened bedlam.
So hark ye Everard : Randal and Patterson
Shall come and write while I put on my clothes,
And you must also finish the report.

ACT II.

SCENE—*The Council Chamber in Whitehall Palace. Present, the KING on a raised chair at the middle of the table. Seated at either hand, the Lord Keeper FINCH, Archbishop LAUD, Bishop JUXON the Lord Treasurer, Lord COTTINGTON Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Marquis HAMILTON, and the two Secretaries of State.*

KING CHARLES.

My Lords, I summon you to meet thus early
Because the Parliament begins to-day,
And we require good counsel how to guide
The gústy tempers of that bold assemblage,
And if not guide them, how resist the storm ?
It is your place, Lord Keeper, to declare
In special what demands our chief debate.

FINCH.

All England, please your Majesty, knows well
That the assembling of the Parliament
Is not a motion of the royal will,
But forced by sullen hard necessity.
There is a Scottish army in the land ;

The English troops but faintly would resist
Those whom they rather hold for friends than foes ;
And in this angry stop of rule and right
The general voice required a Parliament ;
The peers advised it ; 'twas the clamorous wish
Of all the gentry ; and the baser sort
With one dread shout of fury swelled the cry.
Your Majesty, and some few counsellors,
Opposed it stiffly ; for the Commons' House,
Assembled thus by need and not by grace,
Would find its power in that necessity
From which it sprang, and make the throne itself
But the dumb partner of the Speaker's chair,
With tawdrier gilding but with less of awe.
Yet help was none ; all else had long been tried
And failed of its effect ; and thus, at last,
Your Majesty declared your gracious will
That they should meet. But much I fear, a King,
If thus compelled to call a Parliament,
When all evasions have been sought in vain,
Must yield consent to its extreme demands.

KING CHARLES.

You speak out plain, my Lord ; but I deny not
The seeming truth of this rude argument.
What, think you, will the Commons most desire ?

FINCH.

They will, no doubt, maintain—and all the realm
Will back the boasting e'en at risk of blood—
That Parliament is of right, and that the King
Shall not without their counsel rule the land.

KING CHARLES.

They make the crown a graver kind of bauble,
And claim to be themselves five hundred kings.

FINCH.

And they, thus arrogant in things of state,
Declare it as a law for Christian men,
That bishops shall not stray beyond the church
To soil their hallowed feet in temporal paths:
And many passionately would bring down
Within the church itself the bishops' power.

LAUD.

O! may it please your sacred Majesty,
Whose wisdom is from Heaven as theirs from earth,
The very rumour of such blasphemy
Wounds the pure faith of any Christian soul.

KING CHARLES.

My good Lord Primate, I commend your zeal,
Which eats you up. Lord Keeper, now proceed.

FINCH.

Then, in few words to end, your Majesty
Must now conclude whether to yield up all
The Commons ask—

KING CHARLES.

My lord, I think you dream.

FINCH.

Denying so much, shall we give anything;
And then, if anything,—what ? that is the question.

KING CHARLES.

What say you ?

FINCH.

Being of the law, I think,
To sacrifice the pair of iron gauntlets
That long have stoutly grasped the penal sword,
The great Star-chamber Court and High Commission,
May be perhaps a means to save much more.

LAUD.

I, as a spiritual man, must warn the crown
That if the Court of High Commission falls,
Then all self-willed licentious ignorance
And private faith and conscience will rush in,
And overwhelm the altar built by God.

KING CHARLES.

No doubt, my lords, the factious puritans

By their reform would fix upon the church
A Parliament, that, called a Presbytery,
Should be as shameless bold against the crown,
As that which wrecks the state. While I am King
I will be absolute ruler of the church
Through bishops, under Heaven, my delegates.

LAUD.

O! saintly faith. A blessing from above
Will rest upon it.

KING CHARLES.

Lord Primate, speak your mind.

LAUD.

I would before this morning's sun declines,
Helped by my servants, officers, and friends,
And faithful clergy, seize amid the streets
And in their houses, all schismatic preachers,
Would try them straightway by the canon law,
Then give them over to the secular arm,
And if a score or twain were hanged at once
Their bold lay brethren would begin to quake,
And we should have a quiet House of Commons.

COTTINGTON.

A valiant project! And, no doubt, my Lord
Has in his closet safely hid at Lambeth

An army of a hundred thousand men
To guard the doing of this holy deed.

KING CHARLES.

Peace, Cottington ! You do not bear in mind
His Lordship's venerable place and function—

LAUD.

I suffer like my Master, and am mute.

KING CHARLES.

Though I too fear his zeal outruns his power.
But tell us further what is your proposal ?

COTTINGTON.

To yield at once what cannot be retained,
Yield it without reserve or after-thought,
And keep whate'er we can.

KING CHARLES.

And what is that

We may not hope some day to seize again,
If not too frankly now surrendered up ?

COTTINGTON.

More than some deem. For full a hundred years
Since royal Henry broke the bonds of Rome,
And taught his people, though despite his will,
To doubt traditional authority,

And ask, with Luther, where is Truth—and what ?
Since then, by preaching, books, and hourly wont
Of all men searching Scripture for themselves,
They have grown fast in knowledge.

LAUD.

Rather say

In ignorance.

KING CHARLES.

Peace, Lord Primate.

COTTINGTON.

And more fast

In self-esteem. Add, that for all this time
No strange invaders have laid waste the land,
That scarce has known an hour of civil war.
Hence Wealth has flourished in security,
While Labour with hard hands and dusty tools
Has turned each winter's clods to summer gold ;
And winged with her innumerable sails,
Commerce has made all winds her ministers,
And with the riches of all happier skies
Warmed our cold air. 'Tis thus in every heart
New pride has grown and purse-fed confidence ;
Till, what with fire-heat of religious faith,
And sturdiness full-blown by worldly good,

The people have for more than fifty years
Risen in ambition as in wealth and power,
And claimed with deepening multiplying voice
Whatever stands in fact or in belief
As ancient right and franchise of the land ;
To which their numbers and their courage swollen
Have given a perilous force against the Crown
Undreamt in leaner, less brain busy times.
Hence, through your Majesty's reign of sixteen years
Ne'er have the Palace and the House of Commons
Been inward friends. Our policy has aimed
To rule without them by prerogative,
On which at last a deadly blight has fallen
And withered all that green and spreading tree
Into a leafless and a tottering stem.
The Parliament now comes on us at last
In spite of him whose royal name it owns,
And through the breach necessity has made,
Comes armed in panoply for open war,
And flushed at once with hate and with revenge—

KING CHARLES.

You talk of traitors, not of loyal men.

COTTINGTON.

I but describe the nation as it is.

The treason of all England is a crime
Not easily punished ; and I therefore fear
His Majesty must choose between these counsels :
To yield, as victims to the general hate,
The ministers of royal government,
And thus preserve the royalties themselves—
If aught can keep them—that we long maintained ;
Or else dismiss the men to safe oblivion,
And give those vast and bright prerogatives—
Not gems alone, but talismanic jewels—
Into the bold hands of the Parliament,
And shelter thus the servants of his power
Behind a lower but a less odious throne.

LAUD.

Alas ! who is it in the royal council
That dares to wag a loose rebellious tongue
Against the star-bright majesty of kings,
Appointed vicegerents on earth of Heaven,
To be the nursing fathers of the Church,
And bear the sword against the foes of God ?

FINCH.

But with his Grace of Canterbury's leave,
It is the law which by the will of Heaven

Metes out the rights of kings as well as subjects;
And what law gives law too may take away.

KING CHARLES.

Great clerks declare, Lord Keeper, that to kings
Above the written rule, somewhat belongs,
Which they must use to guard the public weal,
Or answer it to Heaven, but not to men.

HAMILTON.

Yet were it well, perhaps, to yield some part
Of tall authority, and gain the safety
Of those who long have stood around the throne,
Whom now perhaps only the Parliament
Could rescue from the madness of the crowd.

KING CHARLES.

What would you yield, Lord Marquis ?

HAMILTON.

I would seek

To keep the civil sword, and leave the spiritual
An idle trophy in the nation's hands.

LAUD.

Give up the ark of God ! Thus worldly wisdom
Turns traitor against Him who made the world.
Dare kings remit all punishment of those
Who fancy truth so cheap and general ;—

It may be raked for by the vilest hands,
And found in every kennel any day ?
Truth, which by seraphs from the skies was brought,
A lamp of sempiternal diamond ;
Then trusted to the grave selected few
A priceless hoard in Faith's mysterious dome,
Approached by pilgrimage and named in prayer ;
Not babbled of in every market-place,
Nor like an ale-jug, tossed from hand to hand.
Woe, woe ! upon the base unreverent age
That holds our Maker's will a thing profane,
For every chance companion's pottle-talk ;
Not guards it in religion's inmost shrine,
There watched by awful white-robed ministers,
The human angels of God's earthly throne.
And double woe to those whom Heaven appoints
The worldly watchers of its holy fire,
If they neglect the entrusted miracle,
And leave the symbols and the house of Christ
For the lewd rout to grunt and swill them there.

KING CHARLES.

No doubt religion is the strength of man,
Which failing, not the Church alone, but State,
Crown, Commons, ay Lord Marquis, and the Peers,
Will lose themselves and rot in mere corruption.

JUXON.

May we not hold that showing to the Commons
In fair frank words your Majesty's true goodness,
And promising redress of all abuse,
We shall convert their thoughts to loyalty ?

KING CHARLES.

Therein is all my hope. It is an art
Needful for kings to make such fair profession
As may prevent by words the loss of power.

COTTINGTON.

That song, I fear, will not be new to them.

LAUD.

I will put up my prayers for fire from Heaven
To blast them all.

COTTINGTON.

It must fall quickly then,
Or be too late.

KING CHARLES.

And thus at stress of need
It seems that nothing is concluded yet.
Alas ! ere night what mischief may betide.

[A knock at the door. One of the Secretaries goes to inquire and returns.]

SECRETARY.

Lord Strafford, please your Majesty, craves admittance.

KING CHARLES.

Lord Strafford here ! A sudden light in darkness !

Enter STRAFFORD.

Welcome, my Lord ; you bring us help in time.
We have debated much, but nought resolved,
Nor know what course we shall pursue this day,
In face of our loud Commons. Speak, my Lord :
Is it your counsel to resist or yield ?

STRAFFORD.

O ! who would see his king a sceptred shadow,
Or a crowned effigy above a tomb,
Wearing the imposture of a godlike greatness
In mockery of the nothing that he is ?
Far be the thought from us, and this alone
The question mooted, how to best assert
Against the muddy torrent of the time,
The royal strength and dignity of England.
About your Majesty with grief I see
Pale trembling faces and distracted eyes,
As if we ventured in a doubtful cause
More than the prize is worth. But O ! my Liege,
Let us believe that though our enemies roar,
And rouse all mischief's host to war against us,
The only danger we cannot strike down

As a keen falcon might the clamorous crows,
Is that which haunts our own false fearful bosoms.
Man these with courage and true loyalty,
And no rebellious mouth will dare to groan.
For why?—there dwells even in knaves a conscience,
That vindicates the right of lawful rule,
If rulers turn not traitors to themselves,
And bribe faint conscience to revolt against them.

KING CHARLES.

My noble Lord Lieutenant! but say what blow
Most breaks the malice of our enemies.

STRAFFORD.

In sum, but this: if your wind-pregnant Commons
Babble of this and that as grievances,
Considering but the cost, and not the gain
Even to themselves of puissant government,
'Tis my poor counsel that your Majesty
Would offer, nay command due search be made
In each particular, and if wrong be found,
As oft by human error must betide,
Proffer such absolute and free redress
As best may cope against th' apparent ill.
But if on this a vain exorbitant crew
Proceed to ask surrender of one 'ot

Of those prerogatives connatural
With monarchy itself, and handed down
Through long succession of wise ancestors,
Then may we give that craving monstrous maw
Only disdainful words of stern rebuke
Whereon to chew the cud of its affliction ;
And may proclaim those powers acknowledged yours
Are far more sacred than the rights enjoyed
By any private subject in the realm ;
Because your Majesty's prerogatives
Regard the total state and its cohesion,
Wherein is knitted and incorporate
The highest good of each particular man,
As the leaf's welfare in the tree that bears it.
Nor do I doubt within the Commons' House
To find enow of worthy gentlemen
Who thus instructed and thus warned will spend
Their dearest blood for this time-blazoned throne.

FINCH.

Grant Heaven that so it prove !

KING CHARLES.

What ! my Lord Keeper,
Think you that wisdom resonant as this
Will find no echoes in my people's heart ?

E

LAUD.

Though weak myself, in virtue of my function
I dare proclaim, by Heaven's authority,
The fulness of all blessings on this counsel.

KING CHARLES.

But, my good Lord of Strafford, one pale doubt
Lingers about the doors where feast within
At mirthful revel our confiding hopes :—
If these hot leaders of brainsick misrule
Not only strike at grievances and wrongs,
But call my servants too in deadly question—

STRAFFORD.

Surely, my liege, the common course of law
Is all we need to prove us innocent.

KING CHARLES.

And if, as these men may perhaps enforce,
The law by some high-strained interpretation
Smites the King's servants for the King's commands ?

STRAFFORD.

Your Majesty's best privilege of mercy
May best unweave the snares of captious hands.

COTTINGTON.

Alas ! if hard compulsion reach the crown,

And seal the fountain of its mercies up,
You, my good Lord, as foremost of us all.—

HAMILTON (*aside*).

And as the worst foe Scotland ever had.

COTTINGTON.

May be the first to fall unrighteously.

STRAFFORD.

I cannot perish in a worthier cause.

KING CHARLES.

Nay, Cottington, when you and I in Spain
Walked in the moonlight streets of fair Madrid,
How much unwelcome the surprise had been
To hear a screech-owl mar the serenade
Sung in due worship of some dark-eyed beauty.
My bosom now laughs joyous and secure,
And has no hearing for your peevish threats.
My Lords, no more I claim your valued moments ;
The road Lord Strafford points us out is ours,
And see therein you guide yourselves aright.

COTTINGTON (*aside to FINCH as they go out*).

Sometimes the screech-owl was a bird of wisdom,
And those sweet serenades were choked in blood.

[*Exeunt.* KING CHARLES signs to STRAFFORD, who remains.

KING CHARLES.

So cheerful courage, Strafford, fills your face,
You must have slept with less of care than I.

STRAFFORD.

Please it your Majesty I rode all night,
With weariness of limbs and racking pain,
In hope to join this morning's council.

KING CHARLES.

Thus

Doth the true spirit rule the treacherous body !
Yet must you bring some tidings of good hope
Which never have we needed more than now.

STRAFFORD.

I have no happy tidings, please you sir ;
But a black rumour of alarm and hate
Fills all the air with its infernal steam.
All hearts against their sovereign make revolt,
And that unchecked will soon be revolution.

KING CHARLES.

Ah ! Strafford, 'tis a misery for a King
Who feeds high thoughts within a royal breast,
Thus to be jostled, hacked at, galled, and stung,
By those whom Heaven ordains his instruments.

STRAFFORD.

Your Majesty well knows my private mind,
A thought I've kept close-shut from all but you,
That England's King may, through his Parliament,
Govern his people with as proud a spirit
As emperors whose sceptre is the sword :
But would he rule them by apparent will,
May find the meanest clay-skull neat-herd living
A sullen foe not easily subdued.

KING CHARLES.

I hate the name of Parliament ; those tongues
Smite worse than daggers, and their insolence
All over stabs me with envenomed wounds.

STRAFFORD.

Would they but always talk, and never act,
The smart, methinks, would hardly match the gain.
Let the dogs bark when we have drawn their teeth.

KING CHARLES.

And how would you restrain the deeds they purpose ?
Their talk is still the seed of worse resolves.

STRAFFORD.

I laid my thoughts before your Majesty,
And your advisers, but some minutes gone.

KING CHARLES.

And is that all the counsel you can offer ?

STRAFFORD.

It seemed too much for some of those who heard.

KING CHARLES.

Lord Strafford—no ! I see it in your eyes
And in those limbs so built upon the ground :
And ever and anon, I've marked, your hand
Grasps at your hilt as there alone at home.
O ! tell me what resplendent sword of light
Dwells in the scabbard of your silent soul,
Nor look untroubled on your King's despair.

STRAFFORD (*kneeling*).

Forgive, my liege, my secret. If I speak,
Not I alone may fall but many with me.

KING CHARLES.

Rise, my good lord. I ask not bended knees,
An open heart and a plain tongue were better.

STRAFFORD.

Then be the curse of failure not with me,
Though I may bear the blow.

KING CHARLES.

*Speak out at once.

What mischief can your enemies do, my Lord,
More than your King's protection can avert ?

STRAFFORD.

I have a purpose which too soon divined
Will hurl me down, and make perhaps the throne—

KING CHARLES.

The throne ?

STRAFFORD.

May fall—

KING CHARLES.

'Tis propped on God's right hand.

STRAFFORD.

—May with its ruins build my monument.
Be it disclosed an hour before the deed
Is prosperously done, and—more I say not.

KING CHARLES.

Then wherefore plan so daring an intent
Before our leave first asked ?

STRAFFORD.

Such is the need,
We must risk all or perish without a chance.

KING CHARLES.

My heart forefelt as much before you spoke it.
Then say what help lies hid in your design ?

STRAFFORD.

I tremble but to think so dread a thing,
Which till the moment come the tell-tale air
Must freeze to marble stone rather than speak.

KING CHARLES.

If you mistrust me, can I blame the crowd ?

STRAFFORD.

Not long is caution needed, for this day,
If you forbid me not, within two hours
I shall accuse before the House of Peers
Of plain High Treason to your Majesty,
The leading movers of the mutinous Commons.

KING CHARLES.

Ha !

STRAFFORD.

Blench not, nor quake. Their treason is our safety.

KING CHARLES.

Ay, Strafford, all men know the traitors' guilt,
But how to prove it not the wisest knows.

STRAFFORD.

But I do know ; and have in this small packet
The written unequivocal damning proof,
That Hampden, Pym, young Vane, Nathaniel Fiennes,
And some three more, asked in the Scotch to play
A merry match of war against their King.

KING CHARLES.

It sounds too well to be believed. If certain,
England and I shall owe you more than Rome
E'er gave the greatest of her car-borne consuls.

STRAFFORD.

The senators of Rome, my liege, were silent,
Until success in thunder told the deed.

KING CHARLES.

This bold suspicion, Strafford, wrongs your friend,
I will not say your King. Does aught remain
To be considered now? For the whole court
Will soon be gathered here to meet my presence.

STRAFFORD.

Here are reports which I myself prepared
Upon the affairs of Ireland and the north,
And of that army which may soon be needed :
When these are read your orders can be given
With that despatch which is the life of business.

KING CHARLES.

They shall be thought on heedfully and soon.

STRAFFORD.

My latest news is, that on yester morn
One regiment of ours had mutinied.

This eve I trust the trouble will be stilled,
My orders to that purport being precise.

KING CHARLES.

But should they fail ?

STRAFFORD.

Fail ? But they cannot sire,
Unless suspicion should go forth that you
Swing loose and trembling 'twixt your throne and people.
Be fixt, firm, cold—be free in granting graces,
But slow to hear of rights. Draw not the sword,
Nor let the hilt escape your wary grasp ;
And you shall cast off from your own set soul
On to the faltering spirit of your foes
The awful sense of an o'erwhelming somewhat
Unbodied yet, but which our act may rouse
Into dread substance : rather than the which
All men would shrink within the small sweet present,
And hug known evil, not new ghostly fear.
Be still, be watchful, and all else is safe.

KING CHARLES.

Doubt me not, Strafford. I will feed on hope
To clutch some time an hour of red-ripe vengeance.

STRAFFORD.

Let not this noontide prove your enemies' hour,

And that, and all will come. One matter more ;
I have sure knowledge that Northumberland,
Held, as your Majesty is aware, of weight
Among both Peers and Commons, scruples now
To give the crown his brimming unstinted aid.
There is a place I think of secretary
In the Exchequer, which Northumberland
Has asked for his bald kinsman Lionel Percy.
Your Majesty complied not nor refused ;
But now the boon will turn the wavering scale,
And in the House of Lords before to-night
His voice may help to win or lose a realm.

KING CHARLES.

Believe me, Strafford, you might ask of me
A larger thing than this, nor dread refusal.

[*Exeunt severally.*]

Enter Attendants clearing away the chairs, &c.

FIRST ATTENDANT.

Haste, haste, clear off—they come. You move as slow
As Puritan soldiers did to fight the Scotch.

SECOND ATTENDANT.

Then, master Robert, do the work yourself.

THIRD ATTENDANT.

I've had no wages for this year and more.

SECOND ATTENDANT.

My back don't keep a stomach for such usage.

FIRST ATTENDANT.

Why Dick, Sam ! why 'tis mutiny, flat mutiny !
Take that, and that (*beats them with his staff.*) Here
yeomen, hold these knaves,
And set them in the stocks ! they're downright rebels.

SECOND ATTENDANT.

The stocks ? nay, master Robert, you forget,
That's over now. The Parliament meets to-day.

THIRD ATTENDANT.

As sure as I was born in Buckingham,
I'll draw up a petition to the Commons,
And Master Hampden will present it for me.

SECOND ATTENDANT.

I'll claim my wages to the King's own beard,
Now Parliament's met.

FIRST ATTENDANT.

What ? Parliament ! Parliament !
To talk of Parliament in Whitehall Palace !
Beasts, rebels, roundheads ! Oh ! you mouldy knaves,
As sure as there be gallows-ropes in Heaven
You'll hang for this. So—rascals, get you gone !
The Court is coming—nay, they're here already. [*Exeunt.*]

Enter JERMYN, WILMOT, GORING, and PERCY.

JERMYN.

My curse upon the cards. I've lost to-day
Enough and far too much.

WILMOT.

Pooh—puppytails ! 'tis only
A poor two hundred pieces that I've won.
Goring, the better luck for him ! has gained
Two thousand of you.

JERMYN.

But I cannot pay :
So gallants, for a while I cry you mercy.

PERCY.

Well, Jermyn, my five hundred too may wait
Until to-morrow morning.

GORING.

Prithee Jermyn,
Put it not off beyond to-morrow morning,
Or my two thousand will, I fear, be drowned—
Unchristened innocents ! by preachers doomed
In bottomless pit of House of Commons' votes.

WILMOT.

These fellows can vote earthquakes.

GORING.

Ay ! no doubt,

Swallowing old houses, cleaving earth to graves.

PERCY.

'Tis said they'll make a law, the eye that winks
On any woman shall be straight plucked out
And thrown to dogs.

WILMOT.

Curse me ! I know a girl

Who would not let me near her, till I swore
A bible-oath, not that I'd marry her,
But would hate bishops, and attend no worship
Save that of godly puritanic preachers.

GORING.

No worship but—an oath not hard to keep.

WILMOT.

Her lips, that talked damnation, had no smart
Of sulphur in their sweetness.

GORING.

That they say's to come.

But, Jermyn, how shall we clear scores to-day ?

JERMYN.

I'll pay you when I can, nor can do more.
But Goring, how should House of Commons' votes
Touch the near servants of their Majesties ?

GORING.

To-wit, her Majesty's Master of the Horse,
One Harry Jermyn. They'll touch anything ;
They're not at all afraid of being defiled ;
They've no respect of persons. They would send
A speaker's messenger to the Grand Turk,
Telling him 'tis a breach of privilege
In any pagan to exceed one wife,
When even a knight of the shire can have no more.

PERCY.

'Tis said already they're resolved to vote
An instant message to the king of Spain,
Bidding him make, on pain of their displeasure,
The speaker's chaplain grand inquisitor.

JERMYN.

Well, well, but how does this mad stuff eke out
A danger from the Parliament to me ?

GORING.

Will not the House of Commons, think you, say
Her Majesty, your very special friend,
Is but a scarlet Babylonian woman,
And you her horn of the beast, or gentleman devil ?

JERMYN.

Pooh Goring, shut that ribald mouth of yours ;
I'll hear no jesting with her Majesty's name.

GORING.

Why, man, 'tis only talk ; there's no one here
Intrudes on your more practical department.

JERMYN.

I am your debtor Goring ; but I beg
You will omit the Queen in your discourse.
You're soldiers all and brave ones, men of honour,
And high command in the king's armies, courtiers,
Whom ladies' eyes delight to look upon ;
And with all this my excellent fellow-gamesters,
To whom I've lost well nigh three thousand pounds,
Which I have not to pay. So for yourselves,
No less than me, I crave your weighed opinion,
If danger waits me from the Parliament,
And how to brave it best, or best avoid it ?

WILMOT.

Brave it ! as well go brave the Bay of Biscay
In a Thames wherry !

GORING.

Brave the Parliament !

You might as well stand up against a whirlwind
By clutching at a straw : And Jermyn hark !
King queen and court are all but straws together !

PERCY.

This town 's as full of hate and wrath against us
As a snake's mouth of poison.

GORING.

You must yield,

And counsel all, you understand, to do so,
Until in happier hour the army comes
To give the King that crown the Parliament
Will, from to-day, take charge of in his name.

WILMOT.

So Jermyn best, nay Jermyn, only so
You 'll hold your place, and pay your debts of honour.

GORING.

Perhaps 't will be but giving up Lord Strafford,
And all may then go well.

WILMOT.

If that were all,

I think, for one, and say, the loss were gain.
He 's proud and headstrong, as if all the barons
Who fought the wars of York and Lancaster
Were mixed in his quintessence ; though my Lord,
Ten years ago, was but a country knight,
A plain Sir Thomas Wentworth.

GORING.

Past a doubt.

The pride of Cerberus, compared with his,
Were but the meekness of a spaniel dog.

Three weeks ago and he refused me leave
To come to London, saying my regiment
Was in confusion ; and 'twas only Jermyn
O'erruled his spite, by orders from the court.
If I forgive him—

WILMOT.

Then his scorns at any
Who thwart his Highness' pleasure ; and his hand
Lags not to stab where first his tongue has poisoned.

PERCY.

He may be proud. He has the wit to see
That he alone can do what others talk,
And while a legion wear court-liveries,
Is the one spirit capable of rule.

GORING.

Hang him ! I 'll not play subject to the crown
His black-browed majesty of Yorkshire wears.

WILMOT.

Ay, Jermyn, let the Parliament have its way,
Though twenty Straffords fall ! 'T will clear the world
For others of a freer, blither, strain,
Than this dark don.

PERCY.

There 's not a mortal man,

Among his friends more sociable and glad,
Pouring his heart out like a river of wine,
Though to his enemies his face be stern
As a bronze bust.

GORING.

No doubt, among his friends ;
I'm none of them.

WILMOT.

The Parliament
Contains five hundred of his enemies,
But scarce the shadow of a single friend.

JERMYN.

Alas ! I fear 'tis true.

FIRST GENTLEMAN (*entering*).

The Queen !

SECOND GENTLEMAN (*entering*).

The Queen !

[*The scene opens and shows the Great Gallery of Whitehall adorned with pictures and statues. The QUEEN comes forward with ladies and courtiers, among them LADY CARLISLE and LORD HOLLAND. Other groups behind.*]

WILMOT.

Were she not queen she's still a tempting woman ;
Luxurious daring swims in her dark eyes,
And melts or sparkles, but will not keep quiet,
Nor leave us cold.

GORING.

By Heaven that Lucy Carlisle
Looks twenty times a harder prize to win,
And twenty thousand times more worth the winning.

WILMOT.

Hush, nor let Percy hear you.

QUEEN.

Dear Lady Carlisle,
Your niece, my pretty Lady Sunderland,
Has been so saddened by her proud young lord,
That when I talk of pleasures, masques, and revels,
Which in her Althorp's woodland halls perhaps
We soon may share and brighten, she grows pale,
And shakes her head, and droops her lovelorn eyes,
And sighs as if the future all were gloom,
Streaked with no promise of delight for her.
Dear lady, you must teach her happier lessons,
And warm her crystal beauty into smiles :
Or has she spent the last on her young lord,
And kept for us not one ?

LADY CARLISLE.

Perhaps she thinks
To-day begins for England such a masque
As old Ben Jonson, or our sweet Carew,

Has ne'er devised ; in which e'en kings and queens
May be compelled to play no joyous part,
And wear the funeral weeds of meaner men.

QUEEN.

You too turned prophetess of evil, Lucy !
Let you and me but join our woman's wit,
And we'll out-plot the worst of puritans
That ever hatched rebellion.

LADY CARLISLE.

Please you, Madam,
'Tis not the worst among the Puritans ;
It is the best, I fear.

QUEEN.

Bah ! there's no best,
Where all alike are bad. But, bad or good,
Here's one I'd venture to confound them all.
Look at him, Lucy, and think shame to fear.
But yesterday I deemed, as Holland said,
And all the world, his cause was lost for ever :
But now what glory seems to crest his head,
That not ten rebel kingdoms could pull down.

Enter STRAFFORD.

LADY CARLISLE (*aside*).

Great Heaven ! the King has told her Strafford's plans.

QUEEN.

My Lord of Strafford, welcome to Whitehall.

[She gives her hand, which he kisses.]

Your eye's bright glance, my lord, sets off the crown
More than the richest of our jewels.

STRAFFORD.

Madam,

Your servants can at best reflect the blaze
Whose radiance from a source above them shines.

GORING (*to WILMOT*).

My curse upon him ! How the swart pasha
Has filched her favour ! By his painted phrase
He'd rival Jermyn, would he take the trouble.

WILMOT.

From love-making Mortimer to king-making Warwick,
No part but he can fill to the top.

QUEEN.

My Lord,

Among our ladies here we have some cowards,
Who fear the meeting of the Parliament,
As if some hundred rogues at Westminster
Could prate the sceptre from the King's right hand.
I bid them chase away their pretty fears,
And trust your well-tried wisdom for the event.

STRAFFORD.

Madam, 't will need a dexterous organ-player
To bring out harmony, when these mad paws
So rudely blow the bellows, and disown
The bright celestial patroness of music,
Who smiles on my weak skill.

QUEEN.

Accept, my Lord,
In pledge of your success, this diamond stone.
We know your finger 's delicately carved,
Nor will refuse to wear a lady's ring.

STRAFFORD.

Madam, my hand thus graced should have the power
To do such minstrel magic as might lull
The storms of chaos into melody.

QUEEN.

One whose own tongue is tuned so well will hardly
Fail to make others join the strain he sings.

GORING (to WILMOT).

Look, look ! Lord Holland there will swoon with rage ;
See how he shifts from pale to red, and trembles.

WILMOT.

Anger will mad a mouse against a bull.

HOLLAND.

His Lordship is a flowing orator,
Whose eloquent sorceries must, I fear, be tried
On souls less gentle than your Majesty's :
And, winning as his Lordship is, perhaps
They'll scarce admit his velvet-soft seduction.

QUEEN.

Fie, fie, my Lord ; your causeless jealousy
Brings honour to Lord Strafford, shame to you.

HOLLAND.

Nay, I'm not jealous, please your Majesty :
I would not fill his Lordship's place to-day
For all his honours five times over told.

LADY CARLISLE.

Some bribes more often are refused than offered.

HOLLAND.

And all the reverence of the wise, who know
The inward mildness of his modest worth,
Will scarcely ward a nation's ignorant hate.

STRAFFORD.

My good Lord Holland, it is now some while
I have not been in London,—prithee tell me
If doublets flesh-coloured and slashed with red

Are by your Lordship's known aversion banished,
As I am told, from courtly company ?

HOLLAND.

My Lord, I understand not ; you speak riddles.

STRAFFORD.

To whom more justly could enigmas deep,
And those high tailorly questions be proposed,
Than one so universal as Lord Holland ?

HOLLAND.

If this be gibe, and not mere sport of fancy,
The present place forbids me to reply.

STRAFFORD.

Lo, you there now ! Your Lordship talks as if
Some danger threatened you, though 't is well known
Gay flies may buzz around a soldier's head,
And 'scape the sword-stroke that would kill a man.

QUEEN.

Holland, I own, provoked you foolishly ;
But let such gusts go by. They cannot shake
The guarded fortress of your fame and power.

HOLLAND.

My Lord, but for this presence——

QUEEN.

Nay, good Holland,

We know you prize at far too just a rate
A life like yours to risk it needlessly.

HOLLAND.

The royal pleasure, which you hint so plainly,
Has power—but that alone—to sheathe my sword.

STRAFFORD.

Swords, my dear lord, are perverse implements,
By some men wielded more with lip than hand.

QUEEN.

To-night, Lord Strafford, we shall revel here,
And hope to see you then, and to be free
From those whose folly gives us both offence.

STRAFFORD.

In Juno's presence, Madam, 't were profane
To heed the screaming of her tuneless peacock. [Exit.

HOLLAND (*aside*).

Death and all devils! To be mocked openly!
What philters has he given her? Yesterday
She heard with open ears whate'er I said
Of his tyrannic and unpopular name,
And held me dear but for detesting him.

ATTENDANTS.

The King! the King!

JERMYN (*to the QUEEN*).

Forget not Master Darrel.

QUEEN.

I heed, my friend ; go, wait in peace behind,
Until your suit is gained.

KING CHARLES.

Your Majesty

Has seen Lord Strafford, and no doubt has shown
So true and wise a servant of the crown
The grace his worth deserves ?

QUEEN.

He is a courtier

Whose presence wins our favour even more
Than his renown commands it. I have desired
He would attend us at our masque to-night,
Wearing the robes of triumph his design
E'en now prepares to gild him with.

KING CHARLES.

O ! hush ;

One careless word may change his hopes to ruin ;
And the same blow that bends his head on earth
Will shake the crown we wear.

QUEEN.

Nay, mock the fears

That never yet became a kingly brow,

The appointed seat of glory and of joy.
My scorn and hate would fix an endless blot
On him whose thought could harbour for an hour
The slavish doubts that wait on meaner men.

KING CHARLES.

Is this reproach deserved, and have I failed
In daring aught that should become a king,
As high in heart as in authority ?

QUEEN.

Perhaps not now. Well, then, perhaps not ever ;
And but one act is needed to confirm
And ratify your will's consent with mine :
I crave, my liege, a boon.

KING CHARLES.

What is it, Mary ?
What is there you can ask, and I refuse ?

QUEEN.

There is a friend of mine, one Lewis Darrel,
Who I have promised shall receive to-day
Some vacant place, some secretaryship,
In your exchequer.

KING CHARLES.

Nay, it cannot be ;
There is a man of Lord Northumberland——

QUEEN.

How Lord ! Pray call him Queen Northumberland,
If he is nearer to your heart than I.
I knew it would be so. The lowborn fear
Of this vile Parliament makes e'en their king
Slink from their threatenings like a lackey shamed,
And I must pay the price that buys their mercy.
But if degraded thus I'll hide my grief
Afar from rebel clowns and craven princes,
In my own France, where kings have kingly souls,
And teach obedience by exerting power.

KING CHARLES.

What would you have me do ? My word is pledged.

QUEEN.

And so is mine ; and, as my lot has made me
A woman, and a stranger, and so weak,
You play the tyrant, and I sink the victim.

KING CHARLES.

How rash were you to promise !

QUEEN.

Yes, no doubt

I should have better learn'd your faithlessness.
There's Father Philip, my confessor, knows

How oft I've told him of the many trials
That slowly sap my health and eat my heart.

KING CHARLES.

Speak then yourself ; what is it you would have ?

QUEEN.

Why, there's Northumberland, I saw but now ;

[JERMYN, *who has been watching them, goes to LORD
NORTHUMBERLAND, and calls him forward
from one of the groups behind.*]

Tell him at once, and here, upon the spot,
The place is given away to Master Darrel,
And cannot be recalled.

KING CHARLES.

'Tis pain to do it ;
And yet perhaps 'twere worse should I refuse.

QUEEN.

'Tis but a word—a moment ! Be a king,
Whose will commands, and is its own best law.

KING CHARLES (*to NORTHUMBERLAND.*)

My Lord, there was a trifling suit of yours,
In which we thought to please you, for a place
In our exchequer ; but to-day we find
That, by forgetfulness of some about us,

Who should have borne in mind your Lordship's friend,
'Tis given already, and we cannot now
Revoke the fact to which our word is bound.
We trust, my Lord, occasion soon will serve
To grant some other boon of nobler price,
That may more fitly match your worthiness.

LORD NORTHUMBERLAND.

This had been ample. Please your Majesty,
Henceforth I promise no request of mine
Shall with a whisper wound the royal ear.

QUEEN.

Too much your condescension graced the churl ;
But in the main 'twas well and royally done.

NORTHUMBERLAND (*in going says to* LADY CARLISLE)

Lord Strafford's nearness with the Queen to-day
Shows well whose shaft has pierced me ; but his mail
Is penetrable too. [Exit.

LADY CARLISLE (*aside*).

It was not he ;

'Twas Jermyn's fault. He's gone, and hears me not.
O, Charles ! poor dupe and trickster, out upon you !

JERMYN (*to* GORING).

I have a thousand pounds from Master Darrell,

For forwarding his suit ; 'twill serve to pay
Part of my debt to you.

KING CHARLES.

Alas ! poor Strafford.

END OF ACT II.

ACT III.

SCENE—*The House of Pym.**PYM at a table writing; to whom enters his daughter*

MARY PYM.

PYM.

Whence come you, Mary?

MARY PYM.

From the morning lecture

Of Master Scragg.

PYM.

You look disturbed and sad;

What is it that affrights you?

MARY PYM.

O! my father!

He said the meeting of the Parliament
Would bring to-day much happiness or woe
Upon us all, and spake of danger nigh
The Church of Christ from that Archbishop Laud,
Whose heart he said is hard against the truth
As hell's foundation-stones; and from that earl,
That blood-red Strafford, who, with dragon mouth,

Gapes to devour alive the saints of God.
Much too he spake of perils imminent,
On those who stand the foremost for the right ;
And then he looked at me, and every one
Turned too, and gazed with earnest mournful eyes,
As pitying—and, for your sake, father, loving—
The child of Master Pym. That dreadful Court !
What is it that they would not dare attempt
Against a man like you ?

PYM.

The Lord has power
To guard his own : pray, Mary, pray to Him,
Nor fear what man can do. A rule there is
Above all circumstance, a current deep
Beneath all fluctuation. This who knows,
Though seeming weakest, firmly as the sun
Walks in blind paths where earthly strongest fall.
Reason is God's own voice to man, ordains
All holy duties, and all truth inspires :
And he who fails, errs not by trusting it,
But deafening to the sound his ear, from dread
Of the stern roar it speaks with. O ! my child,
Pray still for guidance, and be sure 't will come.
Lift up your heart upon the knees of God ;

Losing yourself, your smallness and your darkness,
In His great light who fills and moves the world,
Who hath alone the quiet of perfect motion—
Sole quiet, not mere death. And now, dear Mary,
My blessing be upon you. Go, and spend
In works of loving peaceful charity
The coming hours ; the starving outcast feed,
With labour of your hands the naked clothe ;
So good shall rest upon this threatened house,
And your acceptance make your father strong.

MARY PYM.

It seems the morning of the judgment-day.
O Heaven ! that it were night, and you were safe,
And all things calm again ! Or, would that I
Were a poor milkmaid in my native meads
Of the green West, where courtly lords and ladies
Vex not the farm-yard with proud wickedness !

PYM.

My friends are at the door. Be of good cheer ;
England, I trust, shall rise not fall to-day.

[*Kisses her, and exit MARY.*]

*Enter LORDS BEDFORD and SAY, HAMPDEN, ST. JOHN, FIENNES,
and the Younger VANE.*

Come in, my lords and worthy gentlemen,

And let us here at happier ease resume
The broken course of our adventurous counsel.

Enter an Attendant, and speaks to him aside.

So then, I spoke too boldly. Noble friends,
Farewell a while. Matter of chief concern
To us and England calls me forth at once,
Yet hoping swift return : nor let my absence
Prevent that ripe debate the time demands. [Exit.

BEDFORD.

So far, good friends, of much in general
We have discoursed, and with consenting minds
Deplored the sickness of the Commonweal,
And rather hoped for than devised a cure.
Some secret cause now startles Master Pym
Forth from among us—he on whose tried soul
Rests the chief burthen of this labouring hour ;
And so perhaps 't were better to delay,
Than rush on what we know not. Soon King Charles
Must ask his Parliament's aid, and we may then
Give it on such conditions as we would.

SAY.

Ay, but my lord, what would we ?

ST. JOHN.

Not, I trust,

Such clearance of the past as leaves untouched
The future power. No ! let us well maintain
That England's people, in their parliament,
Are the true counsellors the king must use ;
Kings all by right, and but deputing one
To wear for them the crown.

BEDFORD.

And, Master St. John,
If this be fact, prithee by what device
Tickle a king like ours to own it so ?

ST. JOHN.

Impeach his ministers, imprison them ;
Threat them with death ; nay, make the menace good ;
Publish our wholesome meaning through the land ;
Urge on the king, he shall consent to it ;
Besiege him with petition and remonstrance ;
Blast the queen's faith and bishops' innovations ;
Caress and feed the army of the Scotch ;
Cut off his revenues, and strip him bare
Of all except the loud-mouthed royal name ;
And still protest 'tis done in loyalty,
And hate of his advisers, not of him.

VANE.

I also deem it justice to inflict

Upon the unjust atoning penalties,
For their exceeding crimes, and hold it wisdom
To build again the ruins of the laws,
That barbarous power, whose inordinate voice
Calls itself sovereign, when it is but savage,
Has broken down. But O ! my friends, there is
For human life, and for the thoughts of statesmen,
There is a nobler purpose than to win
The right of just self-government in things
Material, gross—the sordid belly's good.
These are the dirt upon the shoes of Truth,
That stick to her enthralled feet awhile,
In our thick paths of time and circumstance.
This slough is mortal all, wherein mankind
Thrust down, not up, their heads, for mud, not air.
Charles and his ministers, no doubt, are thieves,
Who, to make one man rich, have plundered all,
And left the one still poor. No doubt the bishops
Are like their secular comrades—daring slaves,
Who, in their worst of functions, use the name
Of God, to consecrate iniquity,
And fashion truth till all seems one great lie.
But, were all this amended, still were need
Of purer good than any thus designed :

We should outbid the market of the world,
And seek a holier than a common prize,
And, by the unworthy lever of to-day,
Ope the strange portals of a better morn.
Build we on this poor earth eternally,
That, which to hold, it rose at first from chaos,
A perfect polity of christian men ;
Free in their souls, where only freedom is,
And owning no subjection, save to powers
That prompt self-government in all they rule.
Therefore, I say, resist unto the death ;
Begin to-day, nor end till evil sink
In its due grave : and if at once we may not
Declare the greatness of the work we plan,
Be sure, at least, that ever in our eyes
It stand complete before us as a dome
Of light beyond this gloom ; a house of stars,
Encompassing these dusky tents ; a thing
Absolute, close to all, though seldom seen,
Near as our hearts, and perfect as the heavens.
Be this our aim and model, and our hands
Shall not wax faint until the work is done.

FIENNES.

Grant all this true, still it is clear our course

Must drive right onward through the flowery garden
That most the king delights in, and its gate
Is guarded both by many ghastly shapes,
And specially by one great instant figure,
Clad in bright steel from top to toe, whose sword
May rout us yet. Strafford afoot and free,
As oft in conference we have talked before,
All else lies flat and dies. Strafford brought down
All else that England needs, her parliament,
Laws, and religion, start at once from earth,
Shake their strong limbs, and lift their shining heads
In that clear day his presence darkens now.

HAMPDEN.

The question is not whether he must sink,
If England is to mount, but how and where
We best may pull the deadly tyrant down,
Who is the head of wrong, and Charles himself
Only the broidered cap and plume it wears.
For that the time must come of open war
'Twixt us and Strafford, we have long foreseen ;
But when 'twill be, and how to plant our blow,
We know not yet, and hardly dare to guess.
His strength and wisdom, that we justly hate,
Make him an enemy to be greatly feared,

Not lightly ventured on ; and yet the king
Were without him so powerless, and the people
By such a stroke so lifted up in faith,
That I would fain delay but some few days,
Until we see what ends the Court pursues,
What friends will share our purpose, and then on,
Swift as a storm I would encounter him,
And bear his branching summit to the ground,
With all ill-omened birds that haunt the shade,
Court popinjays, church owls, and carrion crows.
Till when all voices of the earth and sky
Speak to my ear but this—away with Strafford !

Enter PYM.

PYM.

Away with Strafford, friends ? Why he's a fellow
To keep and make a show of for all time.

[All start up in great confusion at PYM's appearance.]

BEDFORD.

What, Master Pym ! how's this ? your troubled looks
Belie the witness of your mocking tongue.
For thirty years I doubt if e'er before
I saw you frightened. Have you seen a ghost ?

PYM.

Ay, my good lord, the dreadful ghost of England,

Already slain by Strafford, walks e'en now,
And will bestride the world within an hour.

BEDFORD.

Sit, honoured friend, compose your trembling spirit,
And without riddles tell us what you mean.
Few worser evils could befall the land
Than this distraction of its wisest head.

PYM.

Prithee, good Master Vane, a cup of wine,
And then I shall speak calmly. [Exit VANE.

ST. JOHN.

Him do all
Confess the clearest, most unshaken soul
Our age has known ; it makes me quake already,
To guess how blows the wind that hurries him.

[VANE returns with wine ; PYM drinks, draws his hand
across his brow, and, with a long sigh, speaks.

PYM.

The cloud is gone at last ; and now, my friends,
I've that to tell you which, had my white hairs
Been black, might well have blanched them suddenly.

BEDFORD.

We shall not flinch. Proceed.

PYM.

Strafford, the vulture
That eats the heart of England, in this hour
Will dig one wound that kills its life for ever.

HAMPDEN.

This hour !

BEDFORD.

Alas ! what is it ?

SAY.

Out with it, man !

ST. JOHN.

The thing will hardly match the imagination.

PYM.

Friends, at the meeting of the House of Lords,
Almost while here we sit he will impeach
Of treason us the foremost of the Commons,
And, if I err not, this our good Lord Say.

ST. JOHN.

So, that 's your bugbear ! Why, impeach he may ;
My doublet may impeach my hose, my cat
Impeach my horse ; but without proofs, and loud ones,
His accusation——

PYM.

He has got them ready.

What ! proofs ?

HAMPDEN.

VANE.

He has them ?

FIENNES.

Master Pym, then all,
If this be so, is lost : I'm off for France.

VANE.

Trust in the Lord, nor let your souls be troubled.

BEDFORD.

What else can Strafford have but mere surmise,
Which, all believing, no one dares avouch ?

PYM.

He has our letters to the Scottish leaders,
Persuading their invasion of the realm,
And promising what help 'tis ours to give :
And so all's spoken.

HAMPDEN.

Well, it is much, my friends,
To know the worst.

ST. JOHN.

But know we it at all ?
'Twere vain to say, I honour Master Pym ;
But still, a fact so strange and perilous,
May well demand some fuller exposition.

BEDFORD.

Speak, worthy friend ; tell us how learnt you this ?

PYM.

All know, or all have heard, of Master North,
The trader of the world. In these last wars
Against the Scotch, that failed so utterly,
This man agreed to feed the royal army,
And now for payment looks not to the King,
But his poor House of Commons. Therefore North
Is my sworn slave until the account be clear.
He is a usurer, who deals for money
With all the spendthrift gallants of the Court,
And most with one whose vast expense outgoes
All that the lawless fancies of a Queen
Can pour upon his loose lascivious palm :
And therefore when the day of payment comes,
This Jermyn would put off his lies for coin ;
But these my man accepts not, and instead,
Demands court-favour, places for his friends,
Shares in monopolies, nay titled honours,
Of which in turn his clients pay the price.

SAY.

'Tis very probable.

BEDFORD.

I know 'tis true.

PYM.

I made my giant usurer understand
It much would speed his payment of accounts
By Parliament, could he to-day scent out
The final purpose fixed on by the King.
Strafford arrived last night ; and, by the dawn,
The rumour followed of a mutinous blaze
Bursting in his foul camp, and yet the man
With undiminished front has mainly swayed
This morning's council. This concluded, North
By threats of forcing payment wrought on Jermyn
To whisper what King Charles had told the Queen.
In fine, 'tis certain that the plan was settled
To yield redress of grievance, but resist
All limitation of prerogative.
Nay, further—though the Council knew not this—
Strafford engaged to charge ourselves with treason,
And prove it by our letters.

HAMPDEN.

Has he these ?

PYM.

I sent for Henderson, the minister
And chief contriver in the Scotch committee,
And, by some questioning, found that Lucy Carlisle

Professed the preacher's eloquence and zeal
Had touched her heart, and nigh converted her
Unto the godly Presbyterian faith ;
And she in turn would melt the King and Queen,
And win their souls at once to gospel truth,
And to the interests of the Scottish kirk.

ST. JOHN.

I knew the handsome vixen has a brain
Full of devices ; but this masters all.

PYM.

The preacher took the bait, and more to soften
The royal bosoms tow'rds their northern friends,
She won him to entrust her with our letters,
Thereby to prove the Scotch were not to blame,
But chiefly we, for their invading England.
In fine, he gave the letters up to her,
On promise she would send them back to-night ;
So the jade's trick makes us a prey to Strafford.

FIENNES.

Why wait we staring at each other so,
As if our heads already were cut off,
And glaring with dead eyes, and seeing nothing ?
What is 't o'clock ?

HAMPDEN,

It wants not much of noon.

FIENNES.

We must be hid, or fled beyond the seas
Before there's time for Strafford to accuse us.

VANE.

I will not fly, let Strafford do his worst.

FIENNES.

And yet that treason has a killing sound,
And to the popular ear is big with death.
I love not martyrdom.

ST. JOHN.

But soft, good sirs !

The House of Lords have nought to do with treason
When Commoners are in question : so we're safe,
And Strafford's bolt is shot against the moon.

PYM.

Hold ! not too fast : he will include Lord Say
In his fierce plea ; and when in bloody pomp
The charge and proofs before the general eye
Lie red and reeking—not alone Lord Say—
There's not a man of us can dare to face
A world whose horrid gaze will turn to stone
The haughtiest conscious looks.

HAMPDEN.

The name of treason
Would work a wonder in the popular ear ?

FIENNES.

In truth I think so.

HAMPDEN.

And I think so too,
And we will triumph yet. That sword of treason
Is good in other hands as well as theirs,
And will smite Strafford down no less than Pym.

BEDFORD.

Strafford a traitor !

FIENNES.

What, the King's right hand
Himself accused of treason to the king ?

BEDFORD.

Nay, Master Hampden, you are overbold.

SAY.

All men would laugh to hear us speak of it.

HAMPDEN.

Ay, if we speak of it before we do it.

PYM.

It is the truth. It is our only way
To seize the blustering Polyphemes' own club,
And strike it home in his blood-ravening eye.

H

HAMPDEN.

It must be quickly done, if tried at all ;
And, Master Pym, it is your part to do it.
The wisest, gravest man of all our band
Alone is equal to so large a deed.

PYM.

The lustrous thought gives back my withered limbs
The strength of manhood and the fire of youth.
Before an hour is past it shall be done ;
And who will heed the accuséd traitor's voice,
When railing accusations out at us ?

BEDFORD.

The sudden daring took my breath away ;
And yet methinks it is the best advice
The time allows.

SAY.

But if the charge be made
It must be proved. There snaps, I fear, our mainmast.

HAMPDEN.

My Lord, I see not that. We only need
Declare his open acts, of which he boasts,
Are treason, and we need no witnesses.

PYM.

He carries frowning proof upon his brow
To send him to the Tower, and when he 's there,

We shall have time enough to bring together
The several matters that confirm his guilt.
His headlong acts of force against the law,
Whereof his Irish government is full,
May all be made high treason to the King,
Self-styled the source and measure of those laws
Which, therefore, whoso breaks dishonours him.

BEDFORD.

But will this sudden and amazing act
Find swift admittance to the peers' conception ?

SAY.

If the King's servants all with one accord
Repel the charge, and say he must go free
Until each several head is shown and proved,
What then betides us ?

HAMPDEN.

This they will not do.

At least Lord Holland, in whom now the Queen
Puts her chief public trust, and to his wish
Much sways the King, holds Strafford his worst rival,
Because by far the wisest of the Court.

BEDFORD.

Lord Holland is not in so proud esteem
As gives his voice among the peers much weight.

PYM.

I have already taken heedful care
That one great peer, the Lord Northumberland——

PIENNES.

The brother of Lord Strafford's Lucy Carlisle !

PYM.

Will not too rashly stir to please the Court.

BEDFORD.

You think of everything. But how is this ?

PYM.

My Lord was suitor for a well-paid place,
Which had been promised him for some poor cousin ;
But North, my usurer, on the hint I gave,
Bought it of Jermyn for a thousand pounds,
And now 'tis granted to the merchant's nephew.

ST. JOHN.

O, brave ! good Master Pym, I worship you.

BEDFORD.

If Lord Northumberland, when the charge is made,
Be silent, none will dare to speak for Strafford.

HAMPDEN.

Enough, my Lord ; to work ! The time besides
Needs that we warm the people to our heat :

For if they fail us now we perish all,
And with us dies our cause.

ST. JOHN.

But we have friends
This hour afoot among them, firm and keen,
And needing but a word to point their zeal,
With all a nation's force, at Strafford's head.

FIENNES.

And most there's Master Pym's wild eloquent man,
The brave attorney changed to politician,
Young Humphry Patch, who's worth a band of orators,
To stir the lumbering million with a sound.

PYM.

An hour decides if we shall live by law,
Or one man's will shall be the tomb of England.

SCENE—*The space in front of Westminster Hall. Groups of Citizens and of Gentlemen standing or moving, while the Members of the two Houses of Parliament pass. A Group of Citizens come forward.*

FIRST CITIZEN.

'Tis a brave sight to see them pass.

SECOND CITIZEN.

Ay, truly,
The best sight I have seen this many a year.

THIRD CITIZEN.

There is some hope we shall have justice now.
You see how brown this band is ; well, my wife
Says that the patent makes all soap so dear
She cannot wash my linen.

FIRST CITIZEN.

Ay, and on leather !

There 's a monopoly ! These shoes of mine
Cost half-a-crown too much, and all to feed
Some idle courtier.

SECOND CITIZEN.

Ah ! there goes Lord Holland,
One of the worst of them. There 's your half-crown
Glittering in lace upon his lordship's sleeve.

(*Hisses heard, and cries*)—" No Holland ! Down with
patents ! No Queen's courtiers ! "

A Group of Gentlemen come forward.

FOWLES.

Well, Master Millard, this day looks as if
Some good would come of it. Too long the State
Has had its only seat in the King's closet.

MILLARD.

Say in the Queen's bed-chamber, Master Fowles.

FOWLES.

There's now some hope the gentry of the land,
From all its counties, may obtain a share
In what so much concerns their lives and fortunes.

HUMPHRY PATCH.

Save you, fair gentlemen! If I read you right,
You're friends, like me, to England, foes to Strafford.
The State concerns not us, it mars or makes.
Men taxed and tried at the King's pleasure, are
But beasts he keeps for burthen or for slaughter.

FOWLES.

True, sir, alas! 'tis true. I see you bear
A public soul. Ha! Master Lisle, good welcome!
And know my cousin Millard come from Lincoln,
With eighty gentlemen and yeomen more,
Bearing their joint petition to the Commons,
Against Pope Laud and Sultan Strafford.

LISLE.

Sir,

I hope our minds in this are one.

MILLARD.

I come

With full three hundred of my country's best,
From Berkshire bound upon the self-same errand.

FOWLES.

And I from Suffolk : and here 's Master Grover
From Kent, who brings a tale as loud as ours.

GROVER.

Four hundred, Sir, and fifty of my friends,
This morning entered Westminster on horseback,
To tell the House of Commons what we think
Of ship-money, and Papists, and Lord Strafford.

HUMPHRY PATCH.

The men of Kent braved William Conqueror,
And will not yield to this black Tom of York.

LISLE.

Scarce does your Tom of Lincoln, Master Millard,
Speak to the wolds with boom so loud as his.

HUMPHRY PATCH.

His bell will soon be cracked, I trust, and yours
Ring the more loudly when his sound is done.
I am of London, gentlemen, and have here
The hearts of fifty thousand honest men
Set to my vow of hate against Lord Strafford.

(*A cry of*)—"No Laud! We want no Pope in England!
Judas!"

FIRST WOMAN.

O! I could tear his eyes out!

SECOND WOMAN.

Man of blood !

THIRD WOMAN.

Where 's Master Prynne ? And where sweet Master
Leighton ?

(*Cries*)—"Down with the Bishops !"

HUMPHRY PATCH.

Down with all High Priests !
Down with black Satan ! and his purple chaplain !

LISLE.

I love to hear the bawling of the rogues ;
It shows a spirit.

(*Cries of*)—"Essex ! Long live Essex !
Long live the worthy Lord ! the people's friend !"

MILLARD.

That sounds well, and the honest Earl deserves
Their loudest greetings ; he 's an open man.

GROVER.

And no court minion.

HUMPHRY PATCH.

Loves not blood—like Strafford.

FOWLES.

Ah ! would the sweet Lord Essex were the adviser
Whom the King trusted !

HUMPHRY PATCH.

He ? there 's one whose counsels
Suit the King better, and who has, I fear,
Courage and wit to make his purpose good.

MILLARD.

Strafford ! 'tis very true ; he 's the dark nightmare
That sits upon his country's painful breast.

[Shouts of "Strafford !" and the crowd runs forward.]

GROVER.

Hark ! how they sound his name, and rush this way.

MILLARD.

What is 't they seek ?

LISLE.

You saw not then a man

Swiftly fix up a paper here close by,
And then run off ? 'Tis headed plainly STRAFFORD !
The crowd have caught the scent, and here they come.

(Crowd shout confusedly)—" No Strafford !—What is
this ?—Read the placard !

" Lord Strafford's treason ! You, Sir, you can read,
Come read it out for benefit of all."

HUMPHRY PATCH.

Well, if I must I will. But yesterday
The bravest man in England had not dared
Read such a paper here in Westminster.

CITIZEN.

Ay, Sir, but now we've got our Parliament.

HUMPHRY PATCH.

I cannot read the paper at that height.

Nor is it fault of mine if some rude hand

Has thrust another copy on 't in my pocket,

Which I by chance find there, and now will read.

(*Reads*)—England ! thou that long hast borne
Shame at home, and foreign scorn,
Since, O grief ! Elizabeth
Sank, and we with her, in death—
England ! thou hast lost the cause
Both of Gospel and of Laws ;
And the hangman's bloody tools
Teach that godly men are fools !
While the greedy courtier's tax
Strips the coat from poor man's backs,
And he bids us, with a grin,
Give him thanks we keep the skin ;
And black Strafford standing by,
Smites the mouth which dares to sigh.
England ! if thou hast a tongue
By no devilish engine wrung,
If thy words are safe from fees
Claimed by new Court-patentees,
Tell me why thy present curse
Is than all before it worse ?

'Tis because in other time
Courtiers joined not scorn to crime ;
Having killed and eat their prey,
Did not spurn the bones away.
Ne'er before did Lord and Priest
Curse while they devoured the feast :
Villain Wentworth, dotard Laud
Meet to compass blood by fraud ;
And again we see, alas !
Pilate joined to Caiaphas.

FIRST CITIZEN.

Pilate—that 's Strafford ; hear you that my friend ?

SECOND CITIZEN.

'Tis true and apt ; and Laud is Caiaphas.

THIRD CITIZEN.

Let me come near. O, let me near, kind souls !
I am a cripple, friends, as you may see,
Lamed by the wearing of my heavy chains
Four winter months within the gaol at York,
Where I was thrown by Strafford's northern council,
For nothing else but saying that the Queen
Is an idolatrous cruel Jezabel.

FIRST CITIZEN.

Poor man, you 've had much wrong !

SECOND CITIZEN.

Heaven blast the Queen !

HUMPHRY PATCH.

(*Reads*)—But I hear a pleasant song—
Strafford's reign is not for long ;
Soon on him shall vengeance hurry,
And my Lord of Canterbury
May the bells of Lambeth toll,
And sing masses for his soul !
But the devil will hardly part
With a friend so near his heart.

FIRST CITIZEN.

O ! I could listen to such words for ever.

SECOND CITIZEN.

'Tis holy Christian doctrine.

THIRD CITIZEN.

Kind Heaven grant

It speedily come true.

THE CROWD.

Again ! Again ! Read it again !

Yes, yes, again we 'll hear it. Down with Strafford !
England, thou that long hast borne—Strafford—Pilate !

MILLARD.

The knaves are stout ; I love their noisy throats.

FOWLES.

They say Lord Strafford's in the North.

HUMPHRY PATCH.

My friends,
Hark ye, he's here, and was at Court this morning.

GROVER.

If Strafford's here—well, well. Good bye, good friends!
I have some business in the city. [Exit.

FOWLES.

So
He's fairly frightened.

LISLE.

Not without some reason.

[*They pass, and another Group come on.*

FIRST CITIZEN.

How is it that the leading gentlemen
Of the true Commons do not come?

HUMPHRY PATCH.

How come?
They're come an hour ago; they're hard at work
Now in the House. Please Heaven before this evening
We shall have ale a halfpenny the quart.

SECOND CITIZEN.

Instead of twopence; so, till now, three halfpence
On every quart has gone to feed the Court.

THIRD CITIZEN.

What, will the Members brew with their own hands,
And ale be sold in Westminster Hall by law?

HUMPHRY PATCH.

Nay, but suppose Lord Strafford cuts their throats,
And makes us slaves again.

FIRST CITIZEN.

I 'd give an eye,
That with the other I might look on Hampden.

FIRST WOMAN.

O! and there 's Master Pym, a godly man ;
His very name has a grand sound like thunder.

SECOND WOMAN.

And then there 's Master St. John has a tongue
That threshes like a flail.

THIRD WOMAN.

And Master Fiennes,
That 's a true lamb ! He 'd roast alive the Bishops.

HUMPHRY PATCH.

If bloody Strafford were not such a tyrant.

(*Cries behind*)—" No Strafford ! Strafford—down with
him ! No Strafford ! "

THE CROWD.

Strafford—he 's coming ! Heavens ! he 'll murder us !

HUMPHRY PATCH.

Well, if he comes, belike we can abide

His angry looks, and give him stare for stare.

Fools! cowards! What! are you not Englishmen?

[*They run off, HUMPHRY PATCH goes last.*]

Enter STRAFFORD with EVERARD, Attendants following.

STRAFFORD.

The curs will bark, but 't will be long, I think,
Before they dare to bite.

EVERARD.

My Lord, I hope so.

But 'tis the part of wisdom to infer
Acts from appearances, and from the present
The things to come; from north-wind and cold clouds
Snow, and from fire unchecked a conflagration.
'Tis thus the soul of man prefigures truth
From that which has been true, and grows prophetic
By wise experience, not by dozing hope.
I hear the people's voice, and fear—

STRAFFORD.

Everard, I say,

To-day success is sure. You bear a brain
Discursive, open, generally wise,
But missing ever that excepted point
That gives each thing and hour a special oneness,
The little keyhole of the infrangible door,

The instant on which hangs eternity,
And not on the dim past and empty future,
Waste fields for abstract notions. I but wait
Until the Peers are met in full assemblage,
Because I would not loiter in the House,
Soaked with dull courtesies and trivial talk ;
As—" My dear Lord, you never looked so well,
You must have drunk of maydew up at York."
Or—" What 's the latest news of Prester John
And his pet griffin ? " But before them I
Would start at once, and with destroying presence
Flash all my knot of traitors into dust,
And so be gone again. Is it not strange,
Worn with so many labours, cares, and griefs—
Strange, is it not, my heart can swell and riot
In the flushed plenitude of glorious joy,
Like a boy bridegroom ? Now, at last, 'tis plain
That I shall reap the harvest sown so long,
And be, as bounteous Nature marked me out
And gifted me, the ruling vital soul
Of a great kingdom, moulding all within
To smoothest order under one control,
And making England's name to foreign lands
Envied and terrible as e'er of old,

When Edwards and when Henries wore the crown.
For 'tis not kings themselves by whom alone
Their realms are mighty, but the trenchant will
And shaping thought of some victorious subject
Fills the wide sphere of empire with renown.
The man whose soul is Being's liveliest form
And Order's fairest model, sways the rest
By the true right divine. Thus Richelieu's brain
Awes France, and leaves the crown a glittering toy.
But, come, 'tis time, and I must now prepare
An unexpected show for these mad clowns. [Exeunt.]

SCENE—*The Ante-room of the House of Lords, which itself opens out of one side, but is not seen. Persons entering the House come on at the opposite side and cross over. The Ante-room contains a number of Persons—Spectators, Guards, Attendants, and MUCKLE JOHN, the King's Fool.*

MUCKLE JOHN.

What is that buzz about ? It sounds as if
The hive were swarming. Would I had a kettle.

FIRST ATTENDANT.

Fool ! 'tis a number of the House of Commons
Gone in to take a message to the Lords.

MUCKLE JOHN.

And to what end ?

SECOND ATTENDANT.

Who knows ? Some foolery
Of grievances to turn all upside-down.

MUCKLE JOHN.

O brave ! I always knew the day would come
When all wise men would have to wear the motley,
And the best fool be owned as King of all.
'Tis the Fifth Monarchy, so long expected.

FIRST ATTENDANT.

'Tis strange there 's business doing here within
Before Lord Strafford comes.

SECOND ATTENDANT.

Hark ! here he is.

Enter STRAFFORD with EVERARD and Attendants.

MUCKLE JOHN.

Good day, good Lord Lieutenant, to your Lordship !

STRAFFORD.

Ha ! fool, what do you here ?

MUCKLE JOHN.

I come to see
The Tower of Babble and the tongues confused.

STRAFFORD.

Well, that may chance.

MUCKLE JOHN.

Ay, ay, my Lord, no doubt ;
Many go in for wool, and come out shorn.

STRAFFORD.

Everard, this folly strangely jumps at one
With what I purpose for my friends the Commons.
I had forgotten it : command a feast ;
I will be glad among my guests to-night,
As soon as I can leave the royal revel,
While these men find cold comfort in the Tower.
Poor fool ! farewell. When I come out again,
Remind me, and I 'll pay your prophecy,
Which has a sense.

MUCKLE JOHN.

My Lord, I will remind you.

STRAFFORD.

Now, Everard, now ! Here we must separate.
I shall come back more than a conqueror,
With more than England's crown upon my head ;
Victor by one man's thought o'er dreaming millions.

[EVERARD and Attendants remain: STRAFFORD enters
the House.]

FIRST ATTENDANT.

With how swift strides, and with how bold a presence

Lord Strafford walks ! as if at every step
He carelessly trod empires into clay.

(*Voices*)—"To the door ! To the door ! My Lord, you
cannot pass.—

You are accused of treason, and a prisoner."

FIRST ATTENDANT.

Accused of treason !

SECOND ATTENDANT.

Strafford a prisoner ! Heavens !

MUCKLE JOHN.

Did I not say so ! 'Tis the first beginning
Of the great end. The wise must all turn fools.

(*A confused cry*)—"Make way—make way ! Lord
Strafford to the Tower !"

*Enter Usher of the Black Rod, speaking, and followed by
LORD STRAFFORD without his sword, which the Usher is
giving to a Servant.*

USHER.

Carry his Lordship's sword. My Lord, we go.
My coach is ready to convey your Lordship.

MUCKLE JOHN.

My Lord, just now you willed I should remind you.

STRAFFORD.

True, but it needed not ; I thought of it ;

And here 's the guerdon for your crackbrained sense.
A random arrow struck in the bull's eye.

FIRST ATTENDANT (*to* SECOND ATTENDANT).

I fear 'tis through the eye, and home to the brain.

MUCKLE JOHN.

My Lord, I 'm safe while poor ; I take no money.

STRAFFORD.

A just rebuke. Good Everard, fare you well !
Weep not for me, but weep for England's doom.

SCENE—*The space in front of Westminster Hall, as before. A crowd in movement. In the front a group of Citizens and Women. Cries behind.*

“ Hurrah ! hurrah ! Strafford's accused of treason ! ”

FIRST CITIZEN.

I pushed with all my might, but could not see him.

SECOND CITIZEN.

I saw him, I was close.

FIRST WOMAN.

What did he look like ?

SECOND CITIZEN.

He had a crimson doublet on, and sleeves

Slashed with white silk, and his great hat and plume
Threw a deep shadow on his face.

SECOND WOMAN.

No doubt

He is a dainty nobleman.

FIRST WOMAN.

How dainty!

A dainty tyrant of the Lord's poor flock.

What do I care about his hat and doublet?

We 're not all tailors. Did you see the Devil
Flame in his eyes?

SECOND CITIZEN.

Well, now I think of it,

I was close by the coach, and with my nose
Upon the door I called out, Down with Strafford!
And then just so he fixed his eyes on mine,
And something seemed to choke me in the throat.
In truth, I think it must have been the Devil.

THIRD CITIZEN.

I saw him as he stept out of the House,
And then his face was dark, but very quiet.
It seemed like looking down the dusky mouth
Of a great cannon.

MUCKLE JOHN.

Lucky for you, good friend,

The cannon did not fire and blow your head off.
Well, holy sisters, now we've got the fiend
Shut up in gaol, 't will be a merry world.
We may get drunk at pleasure, and make love,
And have no fear that Satan now can harm us.

FIRST CITIZEN.

Well, that is something.

FIRST WOMAN.

Out upon you, fool !
And don't blaspheme. That 's court divinity,
Learnt from your motley pope of Canterbury.

MUCKLE JOHN.

Well, well, good mistress, 't will be holiday time,
When by the Protestant right of private judgment
Each man is his own church, and better still,
The woman and the child. Set me but up
At Lambeth, with my cockscomb for a mitre,
And that 's the doctrine I 'll make orthodox.
There's never any comfort with a man
Who thinks he has a right to teach his neighbours.

FIRST CITIZEN.

Well, it is strange that this poor fool should live
In one same Court with the dark tyrant Strafford.

MUCKLE JOHN.

Why stranger than to see white bubbles rise
In a black cauldron ? And, besides, good friend,
I am the Strafford in the realm of Folly ;
And had the fools their way they 'd hang me up
As a more forward fool than you poor dullards.
A topsy-turvy world bawls out, High Treason !
At him who tries to set it on its feet.

FIRST WOMAN.

Well, for my part, I know I breathe much freer
Since I have seen Lord Strafford sent to gaol.

SECOND WOMAN.

Yes, and I 've lost my toothache too since then.

SECOND CITIZEN.

Hurrah ! Long live the Commons ! Down with Strafford !

MUCKLE JOHN.

Hurrah ! Long live the Fools ! and down with Wisdom !

SCENE—*A Room in the Tower.* STRAFFORD *alone.*

STRAFFORD.

Alone, and in the Tower ! Is it a dream ?
And can this mighty bulk of countless being
Change in its aspect like a twinkling mote

That glances and is gone ! Or is it not
That the great All around, shone through by God,
And arched more firmly than with blocks of brass
By his wise will, abides unchangeable
In Reason's fixed eternity of Good ;
While we vain accidents of the pure essence,
Poor frustrate windfalls on the soil of time,
Whose life is but the leavings of a feast
Enjoyed for ever in unfading halls
By star-crowned spirits—yet why crowned ? They need not
The glitter furbished on our cheap ostent—
But we the dust beneath their chariot-wheels,
And dry leaves blown from their unwithered gardens,
Whirl and are wasted into nothingness :
And all that seems to wax and wane around us
With ceaseless iteration, is the mist
Blown in our storm of heaven-derided fancy ?
If so, then welcome here the end of all,
And weary Wentworth lay thee down and die.
Yet if all be but vision and deceit,
Strafford among the figures of the show
Must pass away no meaner than he came.
An hour ago I was the foremost man
Of all this land, and now perhaps no beggar

In a free ditch would change his lot with Strafford !
Nor he with any living soul, possessing
Himself, when all they thought was he is fled.
Yet startling is the thing, and I could laugh
To know this is the Tower, and I am here.

[The door opens slowly, and LADY CARLISLE enters and approaches STRAFFORD, who turns only when she is close to him.]

What ? shining phantasms in the midst of black ones !
Illusion's morning rises on its night.

LADY CARLISLE.

Strafford, we thought not it was in the Tower
That we should meet again.

STRAFFORD.

No, for 'tis Wisdom
That fools us best, shaping its perfect future
Out of a world that Folly largely sways.
And therein Wisdom does as foolishly
As if, in laying out my garden-ground
In plots, and beds, and trenches, I should scheme
To see the faithful image of my thought
Imprint itself upon the ghostly cloud
Whose lines and shadows mock my creeping toil.
But Wisdom has its own true ground-plot still

Within the breast, and only fails in striving
To stamp its vision on the world around.
In me be sure, dear friend, that failure shall not
Work back, and ruin what I plan at home.
My proper kingdom shall be still in order,
Although King Charles's realm be gone distract.

LADY CARLISLE.

It is some comfort in the worst despair
That you are calm and constant : and, in truth,
Comfort I need, for there 's a fiend within—
You know the Puritans say I have seven devils—
Who whispers, 'T is through you that Strafford fell !

STRAFFORD.

Lucy, through you ! Nay, 't is a lying fiend.
Give him the lie, and he will hold his tongue.

LADY CARLISLE.

He speaks the truth. The papers I procured
Have brought you hither.

STRAFFORD.

Now 't is you that dream ;
It was my turn erewhile.

LADY CARLISLE.

Strafford, I dream not :

They learnt you had them, and to what dread use
You would employ them. Hence their swift resolve
And bold performance ; and I find you here.

STRAFFORD.

It is impossible. They could not know it.
I told two persons ; one was Everard,
Who holds me deeply dearer than himself,
Whose secret bosom never failed me yet.
The other—

LADY CARLISLE.

Ay, the other ?

STRAFFORD.

Was the King.

LADY CARLISLE.

And he betrayed you.

STRAFFORD.

He ! it cannot be.

There 's not a minion in his Court so vile,
Holland nor Jermyn, would deceive a trust
Like that I placed in him, nor would belie
So seeming heartfelt words as those he spake.

LADY CARLISLE.

He 's not entirely vile, and yet he did it.
When you took leave of him he joined the Queen,

Before your own appearance in her Court,
And told her all your purpose.

STRAFFORD.

Gape for him, hell!

Yawn tomb for me! Thus it is plain the world
Is all a cobweb, men the fated flies,
And a great grinning Nothing the one spider.

LADY CARLISLE.

Woe's me! Young Jermyn learnt at once the tale,
And sold it to an agent sent by Pym.

*[STRAFFORD hides his face with his hands, and after a pause
bursts into tears, and weeps upon her shoulder.]*

STRAFFORD.

For thirty years I have not wept, though now
You share with me the sacrament of tears.
Go on, dear friend, and tell me all you know :
I need it all, that I may be prepared
To tread my downward path as best becomes me.

LADY CARLISLE.

This knowledge gained, the leaders of the Commons,
Fearing your deadly charge would smite them down,
And helpless how to meet it, soon resumed
A purpose cherished long, but still deferred
Until some safer moment, passed a vote

In their own House, accusing you of treason,
Which Pym at once presented to the Lords,
And they decreed, with no forbidding voice,
You should be straight committed to the Tower.

STRAFFORD.

Yet am I puzzled how this charge of treason,
Bare of all proof, and void of likelihood,
Should find among the assembled Peers of England
Not one to question, and advise delay.

LADY CARLISLE.

Alas ! 't is very plain. Without strong cause
No one would brave the anger of the Commons,
Now swelling at the noisiest of its flood.
By keen tumultuous emissaries roused,
The people roared and lashed themselves to fury.
The rumour flew that in your northern camp
A mutiny was blazing far and wide.
The King's chief servants knew the thunder hung
Above their heads, and needed but the sign
Of one proud hair to strike them, nor would any
Have heeded much what men so hated said.
And scores of noble sots, that in your mirror
Discerned their full-length meanness, wished it broken,
And nothing left more worthy than themselves.

STRAFFORD.

Still there was one, high in the people's grace
No less than in the counsels of the King,
Who by one whisper might have gained a pause,
Until some proof were brought : and that delay
Had saved the kingdom and the King and me.

LADY CARLISLE.

My brother Lord Northumberland's request,
A trifle that he scarcely deigned to ask,
And yet implored of Charles with earnest pleading,—
This so was slighted, that at Jermyn's will
The place was given, and bought no doubt from him,
To some young nameless scrivener in the city.
The thing was done to-day, and scarce an hour
Before the meeting of the House of Peers.

STRAFFORD.

Then scarcely half an hour after Charles
Had promised me your brother's friend should have it.
Nay then, all 's clear ; and now the King shall wear
The foul toad Falsehood nested in his crown !
See here the marriage-ring with which the Queen
Smiling, this morning, wedded me to the grave.
I'll write with this her diamond on the glass
Wherein my sand is run—That Kings are men,

Men two-legged worms that being erect yet crawl,
And Life a name for Death's one holiday suit.

*[Enter an Attendant, who gives STRAFFORD a letter,
and exit.]*

A letter from the King! Ha! let us see
What new fine blunder he has hatched to-day.
"Strafford, the evil that is fallen upon you,
By the strange accidents of hapless times,
Is such that I perchance may find it meet
No more to use your service. But be sure,
Not all your enemies and mine can do
Will e'er compel or mould me to consent
That in your life, your honour, or your fortune,
You lose one jot of all you risked for me.
This is no more than justice, nor is more
Than lives deep-rooted in the heart of—CHARLES."
I knew before that in his Majesty's thought
All men are knaves, but not that I 'm a fool.

END OF ACT III.

ACT IV.

SCENE—*A Room in STRAFFORD's House, as in ACT I.*

EVERARD, *to whom enters* HOLLIS.

HOLLIS.

Good Master Everard, with fearful heart
That earthward loads my feet, I come to ask
How stands against the world your Lord, my brother?

EVERARD.

Nay, Sir, all England knows that he is one
Whose courage braves alone a host of foes ;
And if he falls, will wear a loftier wreath
On his dead brow than all their crowns of triumph.
Compared with him, whom I for eighteen years
Have seen familiar as my friend, all men
Seem but as chance-born flies, and only he,
Great Nature's chosen and all-gifted son.

HOLLIS.

Good friend, in fear and anguish of my soul,
Wishing Lord Strafford safe, yet England free,
And torn apart between two wrestling duties,

I fled from London ere this kindled fire
Broke out in flame, nor would I see it burn
Strafford alive on my dead sister's grave,
While with tied hands I could not rescue him.
Thus, in the lone retreat that hid my grief,
But little could I learn of all the much
That fills with dreadful expectation's noise
These latter days.

EVERARD.

Ay, Sir, 'tis much indeed ;
And overflowing from a million hearts,
Thicks the light air with anxious wonderment.
The world is not all rubbish, and must feel
Some touch of heart-fire at Lord Strafford's name.

HOLLIS.

I went believing, as all men supposed,
That even if there lay some shade and scruple
Of doubt upon the letter of the charge,
Yet the great onset of the Commons' House,
The hate, and boldness, and fierce faculties
Of eloquence, and knowledge, and resolve,
Pym's profluent mind, and quick consummate phrase,
And Hampden's glassy clearness of high reason,
And St. John's rancorous pitfalls of the law,

Would needs confound the mightiest single spirit
Beneath whose footstep earth has ever quaked :
While more, if more were needed, lay behind—
The jealous Peers, that brooked but ill to see
This man's far flight above their haughtiest heads,
And had him now at vantage as the crows
A wounded eagle flapping on the ground ;
And then a coward court, intent to buy
A moment's safety with a year of falsehood,
And that would rather see its war-horse slain
Than lose a lock of its trim lap-dog's hair ;
But more than all, the rage that fills the land
And folds poor Strafford in a fiery pall,
A mark for deadly thoughts and venomous tongues,
And a wronged people's worst ferocity.
For not a beldame in a starving hut,
But thinks Lord Strafford is the subtle thief
Who stole her youth away, and left her wretched.
All this, and more, good Everard, known to you
As well as me—

EVERARD.

But wherefore, Master Hollis,
Seeing how gross and insolent the lies
That thus befool the nation—for mankind

Are still half dirt, half sunbeams—did you not
With faithful heart and far-appealing voice,
Proclaim the slander ?

HOLLIS.

Marry, Sir, because,
Though there be much of panic-struck delusion
In these mere notions of the multitude,—
For how can myriads be inflamed alike,
Although 'twere fire from Heaven that lit the coals,
Kindling by contact into smoky flame,
Nor magnify their errors with their zeal ?—
Yet in rebuking them I must appear
As one approving in the main and total
The lawless government the King has used,
And which to mend is, in my heart's persuasion,
The first high task of all right Englishmen.

EVERARD.

To make which reformation you begin
By washing Charles's blots in Strafford's blood,
Daubing pale error with hot scarlet crime.
Curst retribution, worse than the offence !

HOLLIS.

Strafford himself was prop of all these ills,
The weapon manning a weak hand for mischief.

But to my story. When I left this town
I thought for many reasons that at once
The accused must fall before his enemies ;
I meant, his guilt established, to return,
And try if suppliant friendship, and the tears
Shed by a lover of his country's weal,
Could move the rulers of the Commons' House
To take less forfeit than my brother's life.
But I am told, that still with pauseless valour
Lord Strafford fights, and with no cold success ;
And still the conflict lengthens fevered hours,
And none can tell what close will finally
Sum the strong beatings of a nation's heart.

EVERARD.

O ! Sir, your tale is little to the truth,
For words that tower above small things can never
Climb the sheer height of self-established greatness.
The far-spread city long has rocked and roared
In hate of him, while of ten thousand chimneys,
Each one has seemed to smoke with dread of Strafford ;
And as he daily passed along the streets
Between the Tower and Westminster, each face
Has looked a knife new-whetted for his bosom.
Within that ancient and world-honoured Hall

The Commons of the realm, east, west, north, south,
Have mustered up to crash upon his head
The buried thunders of a thousand years.
Still day by day, while sickness weighed him down,
And keen pangs tore him, still alone he stands
Against them all, as Pym, Glyn, Maynard, Whitelock,
Digby and St. John, Palmer, and Stroud, and Hampden,
One after other, wearied, and supplied
By his successor. But Lord Strafford only
Must answer all, and as a castle meet
The assaults of many bands of enemies.
In all their words is rage and poisonous hate,
Blind appetite that when no proof appears,
But rather counterproof puts them to shame,
Stands on self-will, and raves the stunning cry,
"The Commons say it, and the House of Commons,
My Lords, will have it so, and 'tis a wrong
In any man to thwart the House of Commons ;"
And so with swelling phrase and angry fume
Outface both law and reason. He the while,
Calm and superior, shakes not in his fixure.
With swift conception, and with aptest word,
And grave on truth's behalf, more than his own,
He answers all the railing; this explains,

That shows unproved ; with bright retorted wit
Confounds the accuser, and all over blazes
In a white robe of radiant innocence.
And yet withal for fourteen days of toil,
Anguish and doubt, with rascal taunt and threat
Poured on his head like rain of vitriol,
The hail of popular gibe still clattering round him,
The cold and heavy looks of altered friends
Chilling his gaze like tombstones in a vault ;
And still with storms of blasting eloquence,
Man after man, before all England's face,
Dooming his life to death, his soul to shame,—
Not one quick word of overbold reply,
Not one weak wailing of too just complaint,
No syllable that might not well be cut
In lasting marble for his epitaph,
Has passed his perfect lips : so rare a strength
Of sage heroic virtue lives in him.

HOLLIS.

It sounds a miracle, yet must be true,
For none could feign an image such as this,
Uncopied from the life. And yet Lord Strafford
Has a deep, over-full, unresting heart,
Enfeoffed to motion as a mill's great wheel,

And to loud strokes as downright as the blows
Of hammers in a forge : and high, no doubt,
The government of self that can subdue
A soul so large and turbulent, or great
The grace bestowed on one so hardly tried.
O! Master Everard, I would indeed
That England's freedom and Lord Strafford's life
Had not thus met with fronts opposed in arms.
Nay, still, I trust there is some hope : my friends
May do their work, yet bend to pardon him.

EVERARD.

'Tis not your friends, but his, and most himself
That I put faith in.

HOLLIS.

Yet were it well to try
What I can do with them. I think to-day
Will close the strivings of this dread debate,
And then the Lords will vote upon the charge.

EVERARD.

This day Pym ends the sum of all his slander,
And Strafford speaks the last of his reply.

HOLLIS.

At evening then, I'll see you here again ;
Till when, farewell.

EVERARD.

Farewell, Sir, till this evening ;

By when you will have lost or gained a brother
Cæsar or Cicero might be proud to own.

(*Shouts outside*)—"Death ! Death to Strafford ! Hang
the tyrant ! Death !"

HOLLIS.

What cries are these ?

EVERARD.

Nay, nay, Sir, why turn pale

At the good work your public friends are doing ?
Why not let men be beasts, when you yourself
Bade them unlearn discourse, and cunningly
Change to void yells the articulate soul within them ?
(*Shouts again*) I've heard this noise so often, that it seems
As natural as the howling of the wind.
The mob are gathering on the way, to see
Lord Strafford pass to Westminster. To-day
Being the last, they're at their perfectest. [*Shouts repeated.*

HOLLIS (*at the window*).

Great Lord ! They look like devils. Ha ! there pass
Some courtier nobles. How the people hiss
And rumble out their fury ; and, by Heaven,
There at the palace-gate is Master Percy,
With two young courtiers dressed in scarlet cloaks.

The throng have marked that look of fierce disdain ;
I see their faces working as they groan
Against the cavaliers. What, Master Everard !
'Twill end in blows.

(*Shouts*)—"No Queen ! No Court ! No Strafford !"

HOLLIS.

There go the clubs ; the courtiers draw their swords ;
I'll haste and see if I can stop some bloodshed. [*Exit.*]

EVERARD.

'Tis not worth while. You and your patriot friends
Will have so much to answer for ere long.
Strafford to fall—Strafford to die—be buried—
Great God, is life a lie ? Then wherefore comes
So mad a hatred of its dreaminess,
Disowning its own nature, with desire,
Yea raving thirst, for truth it cannot have ?

SCENE—*A Room in Whitehall Palace, splendidly furnished.*

GORING, *alone.*

GORING.

Thank Heaven, and curse the Puritans ! At last
Our friends are coming. Ay, they're knocking now.

[*Knocking heard. GORING opens the door, and enter a party of Officers, with Attendants, who bear in Lady CARLISLE'S Page, ARTHUR, insensible.*]

WILMOT.

Well, if we take not better order soon,
No gentleman will dare to show his face
Along the streets of London.

ASHBURNHAM,

Goring, see !

We 've had a scuffle at the palace-gates
Against a thousand flat-caps.

PERCY.

This poor boy,
My sister's page, has been knocked down and trampled,
And had we not struck in, they would have slain him.
Hollis, the Puritan, too, thrust like a man
Between the rabble and their helpless prey.—
Even as it is he swoons. But where is Jermyn ?

GORING.

He 's coming in a moment, and desired
That I would beg you wait.

PERCY.

Ay, then meanwhile
We 'll lay down Arthur here upon a couch
Till he recovers ; for I fain would hear
What was the message that he brought me.

[They lay the Page on a couch at one side of the room, and

PERCY sits beside him while the others converse.

GORING.

Daily

These fellows grow more malapert and mad.

ASHBURNHAM.

But now one hit my shoulder with a stone.

May his be branded with hot iron !

POLLARD.

One

Has cut me on the fingers with a chisel.

Perdition spit and roast him ! 'Twill be long

Before my hand can hold a sword or pen.

GORING.

I grieve to hear it ; for, brave Colonel Pollard,

The only remedy of all these ills

Would be to sign the agreement which to move

We're met to-day, whereby, as officers,

We bind the army to support the King

Against the Parliament.

POLLARD.

Let but the King

Sign first, and my left hand will do the work

Of my disabled right, and add my name.

ALL.

And mine—and mine—and I.

WILMOT.

And every one.

GORING.

That is the business Jermyn now intends,
And will, I trust, succeed. But, gentlemen,
'Tis hard the King should run the danger first.

POLLARD.

His Majesty, no doubt, is safe enough.
'Tis we who risk ourselves, and his command
Alone can save us if it can from ruin.

GORING.

Nothing can save us but the army's march
To London, which his Majesty dares not order,
Unless he knows the soldiers will obey.—
Pollard, a word with you.

[GORING and POLLARD converse at the opposite side to the
Page and PERCY. The rest in the middle.]

ARTHUR.

O! O! where am I?

Don't take my letter from me. Don't—

PERCY.

What, Arthur!

You're coming to yourself; that's right, my boy.

ARTHUR.

O! Master Percy, what's become of me?

They knocked me down I think—But where's my letter?
My lady's letter—Ah! alas! it's gone.

PERCY.

What letter, boy?

ARTHUR.

A letter from my lady,
Meant to be given with instant haste to you.
O! O! I've lost it; they have stolen it from me.

[*Weeps and faints again.*

PERCY.

Poor boy! Heaven grant the roundheads do not read it!
There's often perilous matter from her pen.

GORING.

Let us but once, with our good regiments,
Be quartered in Whitehall, and talking lawyers,
And crop-eared preachers will be still as mice,
And we, the foremost gallants of the realm.

PERCY.

If we can bring our plot to bear, 'twill save
Lord Strafford's life, that matchless gentleman.

ASHBURNHAM.

Nay, if it do, there's little gain for any
Except himself. He'll rule both king and queen.

WILMOT.

Country and army.

GORING.

I 'd as lief be drilled
By Lucifer himself as one so proud.

PERCY.

He 's proud, no doubt, but who with equal right ?

WILMOT.

Hang him ! I hate these big tempestuous fellows,
Before whose breath all others must bow down.

GORING.

An Irish Jupiter, that makes small beer
Our only drink, then thundering turns it sour.

WILMOT.

And if we murmur, damns us for blaspheming
His Yorkshire godship.

GORING.

Like the Puritans,
I 'll stand for conscience, and not worship him.

PERCY.

His worst of enemies can charge upon him
No meaner crime than appetite of power,
Not strange in one whom power becomes so well.

WILMOT.

No wonder Lucy Carlisle's brother thinks
The love of domination is small blame.

PERCY.

I've yet to learn your mouth is good enough
At all to meddle with my sister's name.

WILMOT.

Then learn it thus.

[*They fight. The others also draw and interpose. GORING
knocks up PERCY's sword, and the Page, springing in to
save him, is stabbed by WILMOT.*]

GORING.

Swords in the palace ! sirs,
This must be answered.

ASHBURNHAM.

Nay 'tis madness all.

PERCY (*who has caught the Page in his arms*).

Alas ! poor Arthur, in our senseless brawl
You lose your life.

WILMOT.

Pooh ! Better men than he
Have died by meaner ends. I have but robbed
The spital or the gallows.

ARTHUR.

Tell my mistress
I lost her letter, and am glad to die
Rather than see her face reproaching me.

[*Dies.*—PERCY gives the body to the Attendants, who have come in.

GORING.

Take the earth through, ten thousand men no doubt
Have died in the same hour, and why not he ?

PERCY.

This loss I know will cost my sister tears,
Which in his bloody grave he will not feel,
Nor can they cheer his mother.

JERMYN (*entering hurriedly*).

It is done :

Great joy, good friends ! we may proceed to business ;
Here is the signature of the King himself,
Not given in full but with the plain C. R.
That marks his clear approval.

GORING.

Yes, 'tis right.

I never thought he would resolve to do it.

ASHBURNHAM (*aside*).

If Jermyn and Lord Holland chose, he'd sign
His own dethronement.

GORING (*takes the paper*).

'Tis our part, my friends,
To sign in turn. The agreement merely bears
That the consenting parties all alike
Will aid each other to support the crown

In its full rights against all enemies,
In spite of any vote of Parliament
Aiming to pinch the King's prerogative :
And here, in confirmation of the bond,
The King has set the initials of his name.
Shame to the subject who withholds his hand,
When that which bears the sceptre points the way

PERCY (*aside*).

This bond, I trust, against the enviers' will,
May save the noble Strafford's priceless head.

GORING.

And so I sign.

WILMOT.

And I.

ASHBURNHAM.

And I.

PERCY.

And I.

POLLARD.

And I, although with no triumphant mind,
And doubting much what ill may come of it.

GORING (*goes to the table to sign first*).

Pah ! here 's a pool of blood upon the table.

PERCY.

It is poor Arthur's ; when he met his wound,

And while I held him in my arms, the blood
Poured from his bosom there.

POLLARD.

'Tis a bad omen.

[JERMYN, while this passes, stands abstractedly.]

GORING.

And here the pen has fallen in the red stain.

WILMOT.

Is there no other on the table ?

GORING.

None.

This dye will serve instead of ink. It looks
A witness that the blood of many traitors
Shall flow in virtue of this loyal bond.
Hampden and Pym, beware !

[*He signs ; and all except JERMYN. WILMOT, the last.*]

WILMOT.

I too, though I feel oddly here. Well, blast it,
I wish that boy had not been pinked.

GORING.

Ho, Jermyn,
Wine here, my man ! We all must drink success
To the good work that we have done this morning.

JERMYN (*starts, takes a large goblet from a sideboard, fills it with wine, and brings it to the table, where he sees the blood*).

Why, here there's blood already! Black perdition

Consume the spillers!

[*He lets the goblet fall on the table, whence it clangs on the floor.*]

GORING.

'Tis a goblet fallen,

Not the King's head.

POLLARD.

But that perhaps may follow.—

All things combine against the deed we've done:

Would that my left hand had refused the work

The better right withdrew from.

GORING.

Colonel Pollard,

'Twas a mere accident—(*a knocking at the door*)—What's
that? Heaven help us!

ATTENDANT (*entering*).

One asks with urgent haste for Master Percy.

PERCY.

Let him come in. Our business now is over.

JERMYN.

Well, I must go to show their Majesties

The agreement signed ; and gain such other names
As most will bind the army to the crown. [*Exit.*

Enter WARREN.

PERCY.

Who are you, friend ? What would you have with me ?

WARREN.

A yeoman of the guard, and more than that,
A soldier who has served under Lord Strafford.

PERCY.

That speaks well for your courage.

WARREN.

Sir, it would,
Could I have caught the worth of him I served.

PERCY.

An honest fellow. What's your business here ?

WARREN.

To bring this letter. Half an hour ago,
A page I knew for Lady Carlisle's dropped it
In a hot scuffle at the palace-gates,
Where he was hurt. I marked a roundhead cur,
Who looked as if he ne'er had fed on aught
But sour and windy sermons, pick it up,
And after having seen the name upon it,

Open it, read it, and march off at once,
Taking it with him. I pursued the knave,
And caught him at the door of Master Pym,
Then snatched the paper from him, which I bring
To him who owns it rightly.

PERCY.

Thanks, good fellow.

Take this, and fare you well. [*Gives money. Exit WARREN.*]

PERCY (*aside, reading the letter*).

Great Heavens ! what ruin.

And it must not be told aloud ! O ! Lucy.

GORING.

Well, gentlemen, I know not we have aught
To do in Jermyn's lodging. By this hour
Lord Strafford with his train-band guards about him,
And half the mob of London at his heels,
Must long be passed to Westminster. The streets
Will now be clear, and we may separate.

WILMOT.

Ay, Goring ; and I pray you take me now
To see that buxom friend of yours, Moll Pearce,
Whose eyes, they say, like House of Commons' votes,
Will not be disobeyed.

GORING.

They 're laughing tyrants,
Not armed with puritanic rigidity.

WILMOT.

Well, in that house I fain would be a member,
And share its privilege.

GORING.

Go by yourself,
For so you 'll be most welcome. No stern guard
Forbids those easy doors. But I must hear
The last of Strafford's trial. Fare you well.

[*They go.* PERCY beckons POLLARD, who remains.

PERCY.

A word with you. You do not love Lord Strafford,
But yet I think would wish to play him fair ;
And more than e'en the life of Strafford now
Hangs in the balance. In this ill-starred letter,
Despatched to find me full an hour ago,
My sister writes that she has certain proof
The country leaders lay a trap for us,
And for the King, through us, employing Jermyn
On strong compulsion of his creditors,
And Holland, now by Strafford's overthrow
Great with the Queen, yet leagued to Pym and Hampden

In part from fear of them, and part from hate
Of the great man his impudence calls rival ;
Both whom, together absolute with her,
Pym and his godly friends have wrought upon,
To make a bond be signed by us of the army,
And if it can be compassed by the king,
Arming us all against the Parliament.
As soon as signed it will be shown by Holland
To those with whom in secret he is knit.
Once known, the agreement will give evidence
Of all that e'er was charged against the court,
And Strafford's head will not be all the sorrow.

POLLARD.

It sounds like truth ; and yet a lady's letter
May not be absolute warrant for belief.
But e'en if certain, what can now be done ?

PERCY.

Stop Jermyn ere he shows the king the paper,
And so withdraw our signatures.

POLLARD.

We 'll see

If this be possible. Ho ! there without.

Enter Attendant.

Where 's Master Jermyn ?

ATTENDANT.

He but spent a moment
In the Queen's presence upon leaving this,
Then to the apartment of Lord Holland, whence
He bade his page attend him to the city. [*Exit Attendant.*]

POLLARD.

To Master North's, no doubt.

PERCY.

And in meanwhile
Lord Holland will have sent his news to Pym.
Thus on a moment endless issues hang,
And Strafford's fate on a Lord Holland's breath.

SCENE—*An Ante-room at Westminster. Guards, Attendants,
and MUCKLE JOHN. To them enter GORING and ASH-
BURNHAM.*

ASHBURNHAM.

This wrestle must no doubt be near a close.

GORING.

Strafford's bold bearing scarce will save his life,
Though it will add an honour to his end.

ASHBURNHAM.

Well, fool, how goes it here ?

MUCKLE JOHN.

This England now,
With all her Lords and Commons, is at strife
To bring new credit on my craft and function.

ASHBURNHAM.

How so ?

MUCKLE JOHN.

They would cut off their wisest head
Because it does not wear a cap and bells.

GORING.

Expound, good fool, how is 't ?

MUCKLE JOHN.

Why, marry, thus:

Lord Strafford has just wit enough to be
The greatest man in England, therefore falls.
A grain more wit had made him play the jester,
Not earl, nor president, nor lord lieutenant,
And none would have accused him of high treason.
Wiser than all but I, he comes a little
Short of perfection, so his neck must pay.

GORING.

Nay if the Puritans rule they 'll hang you too.

MUCKLE JOHN.

Sancta Stultitia, ora pro nobis!

ASHBURNHAM.

Come,

We'll in, though seats will not be easily found.

SCENE—*Westminster Hall. In the back a Throne vacant. In front of it LORD ARUNDEL, the LORD HIGH STEWARD, and at each side of him the Peers in their robes. Towards the front, at one side, the Members of the House of Commons, with PYM and the other Accusers at their head. Facing these, at the opposite side, LORD STRAFFORD, with Secretaries, Attendants, and Guards behind him. The Lords covered, the Commons, and all others, and STRAFFORD bareheaded. Above and behind the Peers, at each side of the Throne, galleries with Spectators, many of them Ladies.*

ST. JOHN.

My Lords, this Earl, whom I were loth to term
That which I fear he is, the blackest heart
That ever inked the whiteness of our freedom,
Has made it his one work to levy war,
In the King's name, no doubt, but right against
The ancestral function of the lawful crown ;
War that shall turn the sceptre to a sword,
And bind us by sheer force, and not by rule.

STRAFFORD.

How is this proved ?

ST. JOHN.

Alas ! my Lords, if one
With flaming eyes and drawn uplifted blade
Rush at my throat, must I make pause to question
What proof I have that he designs me wrong ?
No, from his hand I wring the thrustured rapier,
And turn it at his breast who threatened mine.

STRAFFORD.

Yes, if you saw him threatening. But, I ask,
What proves that I am not the man assaulted,
Against whose throat my enemy points the steel,
Rather than he that first attempts the blow ?

ST. JOHN.

O, shameless villain ! whom the Commons' House,
In England's name, whom all three kingdoms brand
As Mischief's evident and master spirit.

STRAFFORD.

I may not answer with like words to these,
And shall but say, My Lords, that to my grief
A learned and an honourable man
Is hurried on by zeal to such discourse,
Whose justice proved would make me vile indeed,
Unproved leaves him a little in the wrong.

ST. JOHN.

Please you, my Lords, we think 't were well to lop
This haughty culprit's insolence of speech
Against the House of Commons, who, we pray,
May not be answered with the like disdain
By him long used against all private men.

LORD STEWARD.

He must have freedom to defend his life,
No less than you to take his life away.

STRAFFORD.

My Lords, to each particular head of charge
Such answer have I given as truth supplied :
And all summed up, methinks a searching mind
Notes less of peril in what 's urged against me,
Than in the authority and fell intent
Of my accusers. For to any man
There is a forefelt presence of destruction
Even in the fact that England's chosen tongues
Declare him guilty. Yet, my Lords, on earth
Wrong often rules, and much is ill discerned ;
And 'tis the weary proverb of all time
That innocent goodness wears the coat of sin,
The mask of shame, and is the mock of all.
How more may I, a weak erroneous man,

Begirt and leavened with infirmity,
Give amplest opening to the taint of wrongs
That ne'er in act and utterance were mine !
My Lords, my conscience tells me, and perhaps
Some scant experience of my betters too,
We may be vain, unprofitable, rash,
Purblind and staggering, jealous and violent,
And yet no traitors. Worms may not be serpents,
Unruly dogs not tigers. Adam fallen,
Was not Heaven's outcast hopeless Evil One,
And had to toil in sweat, not writhe in fire.
Then bear ye this in mind—not all offence
That any knave was ever charged withal,
Were I a very leper of the law,
Will lay my head within a bloody grave,
And cast my name and fortunes out a wreck
Upon the waste devouring shore of Ruin,
Unless they prove me traitor ; and this proof,
Where is it shown, and what the front it wears ?

If all be true that 's said—and many a word
Carries light warrant for a desperate meaning—
There 's here one petty wrong, and there another,
Too hasty judgment on some Irish Lord,
A scorn too hearty of some Scotch rebellion,

Too just enforcement of some righteous laws,
Too loyal zeal for the King's Government,
And careless heed of popular talks and clamours ;
But all this is not treason, if 'tis crime.
Before you judge it so, let one, my Lords,
Who held a valued place among yourselves,
With low submission, as becomes his weakness,
And the short measure of his doubtful grasp,
Entreat you well to weigh the bulk of harm,
If you, the landmarks and the lights of law,
Warp from the perfect tenor of their clearness
The lines and plain traditions of command
That shape our lives. If treason is not proved,
To judge me traitor, is to say that all
Must live henceforth by chance and not by rule,
And breaks the joints of all society.
What is it but to call our reason dream,
To spread our couches on the ebb-tide sand,
And stack our sheaves upon the foamy waves ?
Law, as the wise have told us, is the part
Of dusky mortal being that has dawned
Forth into visual clearness, and whereby
Alone we comprehend and rule our lives,
That else for us were Thought's abyssal pool.

Nor say that if I sink, in spite of law,
The only victim is one worn-out man.
If wrong begins with me where will it end ?
If one goes first will not all others follow ?
Is there one here quite safe when I am fallen ?
Will hands that pluck the dog-rose spare the sweet ?
And if excess and frailty tied to man,
Who cannot marry power with innocence,
Must now be blown by storms of vengeance up
To this gross height of unimagined crime,
Who, but the meanest in the sleepy shade
Of loathed oblivion, can escape the doom ?
Or who so bold, and of so giddy trust,
That he will bare his front to unfortold,
Unmeasured peril, on the cliffs of State,
When, for a roll of trivial accidents
And human swervings, one is tumbled down,
Who stood but yester eve as firm as he ?
And yet, my Lords, it is not for myself,
Though Life, and Name, and Circumstance, are now
Staked on this headlong venture, that I speak.
There's many a better, braver, wiser man
Has met as hard a mischief ; and 'twere well
If one brief blow for me could quiet all

The roaring perturbations of the time,
And open to a gray and battered head
A still, unvexed retreat, where lying tongues,
Whose hate can pierce whate'er the sun beholds,
Shall wound no more. O ! not, my Lords, for me,
But for the sake of those whom one in Heaven
Left to my care——

For others than myself, more innocent,
Though not less traitors, than their father, thus
I call on Truth and Justice. Yet to Him
Who reads the heart, and cannot wrongly judge,
I trust my children and myself—and you.

PYM (*aside to HAMPDEN*).

'Tis hard to call, because 'tis hard to think,
A man like this a traitor, though he is one.

HAMPDEN (*aside to PYM*).

Ne'er had so foul a cause so fair a champion ;
But 'tis in him that we must slay the cause,
Or, leaving him alive, let all else perish.
All coming ages in Time's infinite womb
Have their sole hope in what you speak to-day.

PYM.

My Lords, few words may largely serve to show

The sum and quality of that offence
Charged by the Commons' House upon Lord Strafford,
And proved by many several arguments
And acts, which he denies not. 'Tis not one
Or other of his deeds, nor all of them,
Regarded idly and unscrutinised,
That must convict him. In all human things,
It is the man's intent and total purpose
To which his separate motions and effects
The outward livery lend, but not the being.
How childish simply one may play with sand,
But bury a man alive with dust, and then
'Tis not this grain or that which does the murder :
It is the accumulation and the mass,
Mark you, the foregone mental concentration
Of twenty thousand minims weightless each.
And every single one of this man's crimes,
Done without forethought and connecting will,
Had made him guilty, yet perhaps no traitor.
Then what avails it that in each one act
No treason is ? It is not here nor there,
But everywhere, and in the whole we see it,
An ambient and informing spirit of treason,
And know too well the danger it infers.

These deeds of his, the story of his life
Prove him as full of wicked strength and pride,
As greatly weaponed and possessed for evil
As any that has e'er with dreadful clang
Burst in athwart the quiet of the world.
And like the man himself the work has been ;
For while all other dwarfish criminals,
Whipped for their pilferings, or for murderous hands
Hung up to feed the crows, but brave some statute
That with its iron vizard hides from them
The front of Mercy, 'tis this earl alone
Has dared to say the very frame of Law,
The bonds of Justice and Society,
Are but the phantoms of an idiot's brain,
Which blown aside nought else is left behind
But the waste horror of one master's will,
Called by the goodly name Prerogative,
The glittering chain of Asiatic slaves.

In England's name, in God's, it shall not be !
And if this be not treason 'tis because
There's something worse.—'Tis treason to pluck down
The royal standard from the vessel's mast,
But he who slinks below and in the hold
Cuts a wide entrance for the drowning sea,

And sinks the ship—that man is not a Traitor,
Because no Law foreknew his villany !

The King is King but as he props the State ;
The State a legal and compacted bond
Tying us all in sweet fraternity,
And that loosed off by fraudulent creeping hand,
Or cut and torn by brawling violence,
There is no King because the State is gone ;
And in the cannibal chaos that remains
Each man is sovereign of himself alone.
Shall then a drunken regicidal blow
Be paid by forfeit of the driveller's head,
And he go free who slaying Law itself,
Murders all royalty and all subjection ?
He, who with all the radiant attributes
That most, save goodness, can adorn a man,
Would turn his kind to planless brutishness ?
His knavery soars, indeed, and strikes the stars,
Yet is worse knavery than the meanest felon's.

[STRAFFORD *fixes his eyes on* PYM, *who hesitates.*

Oh ! no, my Lords, O ! no—

[*Aside to* HAMPDEN] His eye confounds me ; he was
once my friend.

[*Aloud.*] O ! no, my Lords, the very selfsame rule
That gives the King his throne, and you your honours,

And brings this Earl a culprit here to-day,
And grants the Commons all their privilege,
And guards the poorest peasant's daily bread,
'Tis this same rule of reason and of right,
Fount of possession and security,
Strength of all sanctities and all delights,
That now has made a man so weak as I
The human voice of everlasting justice.
'Tis not my tongue nor one sole written law,
But Law the Life, that cries from Nature's breast,
Saying—For twelve whole years of wrong and shame
England has ached beneath relentless power :
At last behold her new-born Freedom smile,
While one man scowling o'er the infant's head,
Stoops down to choke it with a funeral pall.
Rush in, my Lords ! 'Tis yours to stay the deed,
Or fear the curses of each day to come.
You, born the venerated heirs of Rule,
Made powerless lacqueys at this favourite's heel,
Now is the moment, and behold the man !
He stands before you ! While he lives we die :
Your country groans to you for Strafford's head.

LORD STEWARD.

Is this the whole that's offered by the Commons ?

OFFICER.

All : and but this remains, that now, my Lords,
In name and on behalf of all the Commons,
I ask your Lordship's judgment for high treason
On the Right Honourable Thomas Wentworth—
The Earl of Strafford, and the Viscount Wentworth,
The Baron Wentworth called of Wentworth Woodhouse,
Baron of Newmarch Oversley and Raby,
The Lord Lieutenant of the realm of Ireland,
Lord President of the Northern English Counties,
Lieutenant-General of the royal troops,
And of the Order of the Garter Knight.

SECOND OFFICER.

And on behalf of Ireland's Parliament,
I also ask for justice on Lord Strafford.

THIRD OFFICER.

And I for Scotland must accuse him too,
As a fierce enemy of the Kingdom's rights.

LORD STEWARD.

The Peers of England will consult apart,
And vote upon the charge against the prisoner.

[*The Peers withdraw.*]

STRAFFORD.

May God protect the right ! I ask no more.

PYM (*aside to HAMPDEN*).

They cannot, and they will not find him guilty ;
'Tis plain that he 's no traitor by the law.

HAMPDEN.

Then we must pass a law to make him one.
A nation must not all be left to perish,
Rather than step an inch beyond its code.

PYM.

The deed is bold, yet nothing else, I doubt,
Can quench the flame a head like his may kindle ;
And he must fade if England is to bloom.

END OF ACT IV.

ACT V.

SCENE—*A Room in Whitehall Palace, lighted with chandeliers.*

Music heard behind. Two doorways in the back, covered with crimson curtains, which, when they happen to be pushed aside, display suites of lighted rooms filled with Guests.

Enter THE KING with Courtiers, among them LADY CARLISLE and MUCKLE JOHN.

LADY CARLISLE (*aside*).

Friend John, it much concerns the Earl of Strafford
That I be left in private with the King.

[*Exit MUCKLE JOHN.*]

KING CHARLES.

Here will we rest a while. The Queen has now
Some noblemen new come from France about her,
And one young lord of Paris, whose discourse
Of her great brother's Court will hold her long,
Charmed like a Switzer by the mountain music
He whistled when a boy. Dear Lady Carlisle,
My hopes are fairer than for many a month,
And yet, I know not why, 'mid these gay revels
My heart feels cold and dull. So please you, Lady,
Lend me your sweet and pain-subduing voice,

And with some song of liquid melody,
Attune my spirit to my happier fortunes.

Enter MUCKLE JOHN.

MUCKLE JOHN.

The Queen is dancing with that young French lord
Whose dress is all bemired with gold and silver.
It is as if the full moon of the night
Should whisk about by day with a boy's kite.

LADY CARLISLE (*aside*).

Thanks—this blithe news will wile them all away.
(*To CHARLES*) Nay, please your Majesty, I cannot sing,
My heart is much too heavy, but there 's here
A deft and tuneful page of mine. Ho ! Roderick,
Sing now the song I taught you yesterday.

PAGE (*sings*).

I.

Where do the flowers blow quaintly ?
Where does the breeze droop faintly ?
Where does the moon shine saintly ?
There would I weep
Till I sink to sleep,
For, ah ! 'tis my true love's grave.

II.

Where does the bell toll duly,
While the hoots of owls unruly,

Mock that I wail so truly ?
Thence comes my sigh.
O ask not, why ?
For it breathes from my true love's grave.

III.

Where do the tears run sadly
From hearts that once beat madly ?
There would I sink, O ! gladly,
In the stream of tears,
Through Time's dead years,
Ever passing my true love's grave.

[During this song the Courtiers drop away silently through the door by which they entered. At a sign from LADY CARLISLE the Page also goes.]

KING CHARLES.

Sad consolation for an aching heart ;
And yet I cannot wonder ; there is much
About us that might make the merriest pause.

LADY CARLISLE.

Much, please your Majesty. Here, in Whitehall,
The stately rooms and all the blazing revel
Recall to me a friend whom I have seen
In such like hours, but here shall see no more.

KING CHARLES.

Strafford ! But I will hope a better end.

LADY CARLISLE.

I fear the worst. We all have heard too plainly,
In what despair of seeing him convicted—
As well despair they might of aught so foul—
They have brought in and hurried on their bill,
Making a special law to take his head ;
A law to take his life ; avowing thus
The laws already made, and which alone
He knew, could ne'er suffice to punish him.

KING CHARLES.

So much all know, but none can say the bill
Is law as yet. We trust it never will be.

LADY CARLISLE.

How, never ? May it please your Majesty,
It will be passed to-morrow by the Lords.

KING CHARLES.

But still the Lords' assent is not the whole.

LADY CARLISLE.

What needs it else, as things now go with us ?

KING CHARLES.

The royal voice may sanction or refuse:

LADY CARLISLE.

It may.

KING CHARLES.

And wherefore should it sanction this ?

LADY CARLISLE.

Ay, wherefore should it ? I but know it will.

KING CHARLES.

You know then much, and more than we can warrant

LADY CARLISLE.

I know your Majesty's position, know

Perhaps some danger where you trust in safety.

KING CHARLES.

Wherein is this ?

LADY CARLISLE.

Sir, in the formal bond,

Signed by yourself and certain of the army.

KING CHARLES.

Ha ! then in this you have, indeed, a secret.

LADY CARLISLE.

And if Pym knows it too ?

KING CHARLES.

Tush ! who dares tell him ?

LADY CARLISLE.

Some one, no doubt, who thinks the Parliament

May prove a better patron than the Crown.
But would your Majesty fathom Pym's intent,
And gain, perhaps, his pledge for Strafford's life,
Then will you with your presence grace the man
Beneath my roof to-night.

KING CHARLES.

Will Pym be there ?

LADY CARLISLE.

So much I well may promise, having dared
To use the license that your Majesty gave,
And fix to-night for this great interview.

KING CHARLES.

Methinks the royal presence and the favour
Therein to him conceded, cannot fail
To bend his stubbornness. We'll see the rebel.
And now, my Lady Carlisle, fare you well.
There's more in hand to-night than you may share.
Before an hour or less, within your house,
We will ourselves confront the traitor Pym,
And try what terms will bind him to the Crown.

LADY CARLISLE.

My liege, farewell. Whatever else be thought on,
Forget not that Lord Strafford's in the Tower. [*Exit.*

KING CHARLES.

Alone ! what ho, there ! (*Enter Attendant.*) Tell the
Colonel Goring
And all the officers with him to come here.

[*Exit Attendant.*

Let but the army march, and we may yet
Save Strafford or revenge him (*Enter GORING and Officers.*)

Gentlemen,

We thank your loving zeal to guard our Crown ;
And this be sure, that if the wished success
Pours bounteous fulness on our happier cause,
There's none of you that shall not in our favour
Find the large recompense of every toil.

ALL.

Long live the Royal Charles—the best of Kings !

KING CHARLES.

It is our purpose that this night you all
Depart from London, and with sudden speed
Rejoin the army. There prepare the troops
To march in haste, but with exact array,
Hither to us ; and let all things be ready,
But no man stir beyond the present quarters
Until a post shall reach you, which will start
Before the morning, and almost as soon
As you yourselves will find you at the army.

You have the fate of England in your hands ;
Be vigilant, be speedy, and be bold !

ALL.

We shall obey your Majesty's commands.

KING CHARLES.

And now before you go, brave gentlemen,
We'll drink one cup to your deserved success.
Wine, there !

[Attendants bring in wine which they hand to all, and exeunt.]

I drink the Army and the Queen !

ALL.

The Army and the Queen ! Long live the King !

KING CHARLES.

Farewell, brave sirs ; it will be happy hour
When your drawn swords, like beams of morning light,
Out of the darkness flash around my throne. [Exeunt.]

SCENE—*A Room at Lady Carlisle's. At one side a small table with lights upon it. In the middle of the back wall a picture covered with a curtain, the frame resting on the floor. On the left hand, in front, a statue of Minerva ; on the right, one of Venus Victrix, draped from the waist ; both on pedestals of a man's height. Present PYM and HOLLIS.*

PYM.

So be it, Hollis. For I know full well,
None better, all the difference between

Your brother Strafford, and the King himself,
Or his chief servants. One is brave and wise,
And aimed at lawless power for public ends,
Or what might seem so ; while the others all
Love England as the worms and maggots love
The corpse they fatten on. And how must fare
The vermin should the carcass wake ?—His head
Is not the less the sole security
That we can have.

HOLLIS.

What if the king
Displaces all his present ministers,
And names yourself and friends instead of them ?

PYM.

But, in the first place, we must heave some blow
That shall convince the people of our strength,
And rend a gulf impassable between
The past and coming times of our state rule.
Besides, who'll trust a king like ours ? To-day
He makes me his chief minister ; to-morrow,
When he has gained his object, and the people
Relapse, o'erwearied of their high-strung zeal,
There 's Elliot's dungeon and Prynne's pillory,
And the near block, and Englishmen are slaves.

N

No, the whole secret of a crown is out,
And books and parliaments have vented it
Both sharp and deep within the dullest ears.
I should not wonder, friend, if choughs and daws,
Sparrows and finches, were to choose a scarecrow
To be their sovereign. But, I pray you, think,
What if the farmers and the gardeners all,
Who make the puppet of their own cast clothes,
Should straight bow down and swear allegiance to it ?

HOLLIS.

Will not disgrace, imprisonment, forfeiture,
Bind Strafford powerless, though they spare his head ?

PYM.

Disgrace ! To that he 's proof.—For he is one
Whom men may hate, but none can e'er despise.

HOLLIS.

Alas ! and woe, my friend, your uttered praise
Must swell my soul's lament that he should die.
'Tis hard no law could reach his guarded life ;
And for his courage and his wisdom's height
You make a law, that, unforeseen by all,
Strikes at him only.

PYM.

Yes, it must be so.

The Lords will pass the bill this coming morn ;
The King will give consent ; and when Lord Strafford
Sleeps with his fathers let him have due praise.
For when a flood's abated men record
Upon their moles and dykes the torrent's height ;
But while it rages and is swelling big,
Think only how they may drain off the deluge.
I will inscribe Lord Strafford's name in brass
When all that's left to threaten us is the name.

HOLLIS.

Had but King Charles the greatness of a man,
To say—Take off this golden bauble round,
And leave me still the inward crown of honour !
My friend, with you for king, how safe were Strafford !

PYM.

Hear you not voices drawing near to us ?
It is the King. I promised here to meet him
At Lady Carlisle's, and it seems he comes.

HOLLIS.

Farewell ! I wait at hand to know the event. [Exit.

KING CHARLES (*entering*).

Let Percy stay without. I still may need him.
So Master Pym.—Good welcome to our presence.

[Gives his hand, which PYM kisses.

We heard from Lady Carlisle of your wish
To make some offers for our public service,
And therefore have we deigned to come ourselves
And hear what one esteemed so wise would say.

PYM.

I never had the vanity to think
My notions could instruct a mighty king.
The Lady Carlisle has deceived your Majesty.
I came to hear what course the royal will
Through me would proffer to the House of Commons,
And not to give my counsels to the King.

KING CHARLES.

We 'll not debate the matter. In a word,
We wish to learn upon what fair conditions
You and your friends will choose to serve the crown,
With zeal as buoyant as you 've shown till now
In seeking popular ends ?

PYM.

On no conditions,
If service of the crown mean dereliction
Of aught that we have hitherto pursued.

KING CHARLES.

If my Lord Bedford were Lord Treasurer,
And Master Pym our Chancellor of Exchequer,

Think you not Parliament would show a spirit
Less grasping, jealous, turbulent, and dark,
Than that which rules it now ?

PYM.

I cannot say.

If these high officers conformed to law,
The Parliament would have much less to question.

KING CHARLES.

That is to say, if they dethroned the King,
Or made him but a gilded ornament
To shine stock-still on ceremonial days,
He could do nothing more to trouble them.

PYM.

Then ere I go hear but this parting word :
I know the army-plot to march on London,
And have plain proof of all that it designs.
Hence, if your Majesty does not to-morrow
Pass the new bill to take Lord Strafford's head,
Or favours his escape in any way,
Worse loss than his may fall upon the crown.

*[The curtain covering the picture is silently drawn up, and
shows a full-length portrait of STRAFFORD standing.]*

KING CHARLES.

You know the plot ? Alas ! remorseless treason

Must lurk among the hearts I trusted most.
Too plainly Strafford falls. Ha ! (*sees the picture*) save
us, Heaven !

PYM.

It surely was not so when we came in !
He starts an apparition from the grave,
To cry out shame upon his living master.

KING CHARLES.

If shame on me, what does it cry to you ?

PYM.

I meet him with a courage like his own,
And urge my cause as he would fight for his.
'Tis but a sleight of Lucy Carlisle's hand,
A painted cloth ; we need not heed it more.

KING CHARLES.

O ! had I but his counsel what to do !

PYM.

There is no time for counsel. Will your Majesty
Give me your royal word to pass the bill,
And so secure some hours to let escape
The chief offenders who have signed the bond ?
Or shall I rouse at once the slumbering city,
And bring, within an hour, about Whitehall
A hundred thousand men all hot for vengeance ?

KING CHARLES.

O ! no—no—no—my wife—my children all—
I must not risk them. Yet to pass the bill—
Under his eye, with that fixed quiet look
Of imperturbable and thoughtful greatness—
I cannot do it.—See that working head,
Full of conception and of enterprise,
Soaring as falcons, resolute as the stars,
Fall on the floor before me bleeding here !—
Are you a man and ask it ?

PYM.

As a man,

I too can feel for such a man as he ;
But there is something greater still than Strafford
That rises up between my eyes and him,
And hides him from us. 'Tis the Life of England,
To which his life is poison, and his death
A pledge of health it ne'er has known till now.

KING CHARLES.

Alas ! for me. You know the army-plot.
The blood of many may be saved by one.

PYM.

The nation and the King may both be saved.

KING CHARLES.

I fear it must be, or worse ills may follow.

PYM.

Every man owes his life unto the state,
And now for three whole kingdoms and their King,
One head may stop a universal ruin.

KING CHARLES.

I have no counsellor here.

PYM.

The dearest one,
Her Majesty, would hardly dare advise
To sacrifice yourself and her for Strafford.

KING CHARLES.

True—'tis her mind that he had better fall
Than we, the nation, and at last himself.
What must be it is idle to refuse,
When Providence so plainly speaks its will.
No longer can I brave my Parliament,
Though were I but a private man, my blood
How freely would I shed to save my servant's !

PYM.

I take your Majesty's promise as 'tis meant,
Nor ask more surety than the royal word.

KING CHARLES.

What sigh was that I heard ? No, 'twas but fancy.
Great friend, my wise and faithful counsellor,
The truest, boldest, ever served a king,
Forgive me that my hand must do a deed
My bleeding heart would fain undo for ever !

PYM.

Your Majesty will not forget your promise :
And so I take my leave.

KING CHARLES.

Sir, fare you well, [Exit PYM.

And ruin, as your shadow, cling to you.—
It seems a base betrayal of my friend,
And yet strong reasons are there to persuade it.
And oft a king must abnegate his wish,
Devising to secure his kingdom's good.
'Tis true, whate'er the rebels call his crimes,
Are but his deeds of service done to me.
Still, if I rescue him, how shall I meet
The raging clamours of the Commons' House ?
And if I pass the act, 'tis not my will,

[The curtain falls over the picture, STRAFFORD comes silently
from behind it, and stands in front of the curtain.

CHARLES does not observe him.

But others' daring and insidious force.

I would that picture were not in the room,
It makes my flesh to creep. Yet after all
It is but colours laid upon a cloth
By Flemish Vandyke's free and delicate hand,
Turning our gross but mutable existence
To airier, yet unchanging shows of life,
Distinct with golden light on silver cloud.
It cannot feel, nor breathe, it cannot see,
Nor stir, nor lift its palm with eloquent meaning,
Nor fix my look with melancholy gaze.
Tut ! were it but a host of enemies,
In iron clad and charging at their King,
I should not blench ; and shall two yards of canvas—
One look and I'll be gone. O ! O ! what—Strafford !
By all in Heaven it is himself alive !

STRAFFORD (*coming forward*).

I hope to have your Majesty's forgiveness ?

KING CHARLES.

Forgiveness ! what forgiveness ? my forgiveness ?
What ! Strafford ?—Yes—my Lord—I'm very glad—
We need not say that we believe your honour
Would never let you make yourself a spy
Upon what passed between your King and Pym ?

STRAFFORD.

The Lady Carlisle let me in but now,
The moment after Master Pym was gone.
I entered through the door behind that picture,
And waited till your Majesty's eye should fall
On one you oft have deigned to see with favour.

KING CHARLES.

We blame you not, my Lord.

STRAFFORD.

Your Majesty's goodness
Is great indeed.

KING CHARLES.

Nay, 'tis with cordial joy
We see you in our presence free once more.

STRAFFORD.

I am not free. I must return to-night
To where I came from.

KING CHARLES.

How, my Lord ? How mean you ?

STRAFFORD.

Your Majesty's Lieutenant of the Tower
Believed my promise that I would return.

KING CHARLES.

Then wherefore came you forth ?

STRAFFORD.

The King, I trust,
Will never know how the poor prisoner longs
For even five minutes of a fancied freedom.
But 'twas my wish to save the royal mind
From something of its much perplexity.

KING CHARLES.

The Lords will pass the bill to-morrow morning :
What can I do ?

STRAFFORD.

A king who asks that question
Has but one course ; which, knowing, I set down
In writing what will more acquit your conscience
Than all that all mankind beside can do.
(*Gives a letter.*) Herein is written, that, though loving life
Both for my own and for my children's sake,
And yielding not without a pang to death,
I solemnly release your Majesty
From every promise made by you to me,
And give my full and free consent to die ;
Trusting that my destruction may become
A pledge of good to this divided realm,
And ne'er may bring upon your Majesty
A destiny like that decreed to me.

KING CHARLES.

And this is written here ?

STRAFFORD.

In these same words.

Can I do more to help your Majesty ?

KING CHARLES.

O, Strafford ! do not mock your king's despair.

Is there no way of safety, is there none

That I can turn to ?

STRAFFORD.

No, I fear not now.

The army-plot makes you the guilty party

Towards your own Parliament, and open war

Alone could save you now from their control.

KING CHARLES.

The accurst agreement ! which I signed in hope

That thus the army would protect your head.

STRAFFORD.

'Tis it alone ties your detected hands,

That else, confirmed by all men's consciousness

Of lawful right, might yet unmanacle mine.

And even if the Commons knew it not,

The plan was folly. Set the army loose

Tow'rds London, and the name of the King's Friends

Would make each man who bore it as a wolf
For a whole people to run down and slay.
Your Majesty mistakes the race you rule.

KING CHARLES.

I have been ill-advised O noble Strafford.
Had you been always with me !

STRAFFORD.

Sir, to-morrow

Will close a coil that sends me hence for ever.
That journey, for the most completed soul,
Requires, if so may be, some preparation ;
And, therefore, with your Majesty's good leave,
I will straightway depart. My brother Hollis
Waits in this house, and I must speak with him.

KING CHARLES.

Strafford, farewell ! Some happy chance may yet
Disperse the clouds, and give me back a friend
Than whom no worthier ever served a king.

STRAFFORD.

There are no chances in the lot of man
That can prolong my days upon the earth.
My friends—although there be a king among them—
Are, by the omnipotence of their—mistakes,
Made helpless as the shapes of wood and straw,

The royal giants borne in city shows,
Nodding and rocking high above the crowd,
But as the reeling crowd below compels.
Tinsel, and paint, and carving give no life,
Nor all the names and ensigns of command
Inspire with real strength the men who bear them.
Strength is a living substance in the limbs
And in the heart and spirit of a man.
This is gone out from us to Pym and Hampden,
And we remain but vacant panoplies,
Forms of old knights that any clown may maul.
Much happiness attend your Majesty !
The best that I could wish you were to die
Before to-morrow's sun beholds your tears.

KING CHARLES.

Farewell, good Strafford ! though you want my faith
In that high Providence which bucklers kings.

STRAFFORD.

No buckler helps him who has yawned away
The inward spring of manhood and success. [Exit.

KING CHARLES.

I hope for better things : perhaps his head,
Which I would purchase at a monarch's ransom,

May yet, in falling, save from total ruin
The crown and realm it is my task to guard.

Enter hastily LADY CARLISLE.

LADY CARLISLE.

Lord Strafford going to the Tower again,
And with no promise that you 'll save his life !
Not speak ? But I will speak, and you shall hear.
What, Sir ! be called Your Majesty, and quake !
Wear a king's mantle on a fainting bosom !
Strut in a crown, and then desert your friends !
Give up your noblest officer to death
By a vile fate, upon a popular scaffold !
Out on such royalty ! 'Twere better far
To be a king of gypsies or of robbers,
And true to those who risk their all for you.
O ! it is Nature's bitterest sarcasm
To set mean spirits in her seats of glory,
And say to all the grinning, hissing world,
Behold the rulers I can make you serve.
Man in whose total continent of being
True manhood has not found a jot of room ;
Poor doting coward faithless trivial thing,
Whose whole reserve of obstinate sullenness
Is hoarded for your own vain lust of rule,

And cannot hold one hour of firm resistance
At friendship, gratitude, or honour's call ;
Mere woman's fan, aping a masculine sword ;
Thin kerchief tied to one seductive bosom,
Stirred as it heaves, and dreaming that 'tis you
Who give it life ;—O ! plaything, big with hell !

KING CHARLES.

The woman's mad ; her passion braves the skies !

LADY CARLISLE.

I brave them not ; I but invoke their justice
To rain hot curses on a tyrant's head.
Henceforth I set myself apart for mischief,
To find and prompt men capable of hate,
Until some dagger, steeled in Strafford's blood,
Knocks at the heart of Strafford's murderer !

KING CHARLES.

His murderer ! O God !—no, no—not that !

[Sinks back in a seat.]

LADY CARLISLE.

And here I call on all the Powers above us
To aid the deep damnation of my curse,
And make this treason to the noblest man
That moves alive within our English seas,
Fatal to him and all his race, whose baseness
Destroys a worth it ne'er could understand.

Stars in your glory, vital Air and Sun,
And thou dark Earth, our cradle, nurse, and grave,
And more than all, free Truth and penal Justice,
Conspire with all your dreadful influence
Against his blood whose crime ye now behold !
Make him a byeword and a name of woe,
A conquered warrior and a throneless outcast,
To teach all kings the law of evil power,
Till by an end more friendless and abhorred
Than his great victim's, and with heavier pain,
Let him slink off to a detested grave !
And now I give your Majesty leave to go,
And may you carry from my house away
That fixed incurable ulcer of the heart
Which I have helped your thoughts to fasten there.

STRAFFORD (*entering*).

The King still here ! I crave your Majesty's pardon ;
I came but to take leave of Lady Carlisle.

KING CHARLES.

O, Strafford ! I would save you if I could.
I am not what her tigress tongue describes.
They say she has more cause than any one
To wish your life, and I forgive her folly.

[STRAFFORD *leans quietly against the base of the statue
of Minerva, and looks on.*]

LADY CARLISLE.

They say ! no doubt they say it, and I say it :
And if 'tis true that, with a woman's love,
And all she has to give, I love Lord Strafford,
Think not, King Charles, your sneer, so right a coward's,
Will clear your honour's blots by staining mine.
Yes, I call Heaven and Earth to know that wholly
I love the man you slay ; am prouder far
Mistress to him than queen to such as you.
What ! do you dream no woman has a heart
Above your pedant forms and sacred lies ?

STRAFFORD.

Your Majesty would perhaps do well to go.
You know my counsel is to pass the bill,
And buy your own advantage by this loss.
With her you 'll make no way. The Parliament
Were easier turned from hate than she from love.

LADY CARLISLE.

I hate his baseness heartily enough.

KING CHARLES.

My Lord, farewell. I will forget her madness,
And only call your services to mind.
'Tis not my fault if treason makes me yield. [Exit.

LADY CARLISLE.

The deadliest curses are the speech of love,
When all its joys are turned to misery :
And, O ! 'tis grief that sets all thoughts astray,
As waters from a broken cistern rush,
To see you thus full of strong life and purpose,
So prompt and potent for heroic deed ;
And then you set your foot across the threshold,
Where, when you came, you always made the dawn ;
Some moments pass—an hour perhaps, or day,
And there is nothing but your name behind,
And one great reeking splash that dyes the earth,
And stains my soul and all my life to crimson.
Ah, Strafford ! even while I see you now
In clear composure of your living poise,
The air I breathe seems clotted all with blood.
Must it be so, dear friend ? Your limbs are free,
And I will clothe you in so close disguise
As might deceive all England's prying hate,
And we will fly together.

STRAFFORD (*puts his hand on her mouth*).

Nay, no more !

I 'm bound more closely than in chains of steel,
And must depart e'en now.

[*She clasps his hand and kisses it.*]

Believe me, Lady,

'Tis not mere shame and sorrow that I feel
In thinking over what you are to me :
And hearts conjoined like ours have an excuse
That sprightly sudden-blazing appetites
Possess not, seek not, nor could comprehend.
Lucy, farewell ! and may your life add calmness
To the bold glories of your eager soul !

LADY CARLISLE (*still keeping his hand*).

Dear, dear, dear friend ! Oh, Wentworth ! pardon me
That thus once more I fall upon your bosom ! [*Weeps*.

STRAFFORD.

Farewell ! We meet no more ! But here or there
Cannot forget, and would not if we could.

[*He is about to place her in CHARLES'S chair.*

LADY CARLISLE.

O, no ! not there—he sat there—no, not there !

[*He leaves her on a stool in front of the statue of Venus, and
sunk with her head against the pedestal. Exit STRAFFORD
hastily.*

SCENE—*An open space of Street near Pym's House.*

Enter PYM and ST. JOHN meeting.

PYM.

The time draws on, and every thought-swift moment

Wears through the failing thread of Strafford's life,
Which is the thread that ties the nation's hands.
That breaking, once for all England is free !

ST. JOHN.

You've seen the King ?

PYM.

Yes, and have gained our end.

ST. JOHN.

Secured it quite ? Nay then, speak on, how was it ?

PYM.

He promises to pass the bill this morning.

ST. JOHN.

That's well ; for though his word is hardly firm
Against his interest, when they jump, as now,
We may believe him partly.

PYM.

It was my trust
That in his dusk and faintly furnished soul
A promise right athwart his honour's line
May seem to make a duty, and supply
Reasons for doing what true Reason damns.

ST. JOHN.

Yet were the plot choked up from light for ever,
I fear his promise were of little worth.

But Holland's jealousy of a nobler rival
Has made us masters of a potent word.

PYM.

We'll out with it to-day. We'll blare and blaze it
Through all the city, thence through all the realm ;
The House of Commons shall address him on it :
We'll spread abroad the names of all our foes,
Denounce, impeach them, give rewards for them,
And still, through them, point onward to the King
As the great culprit, though we name him not.

ST. JOHN.

It must be shown to all as an attempt—
Which, in good truth, it is—to make the sword
The only power of government among us,
And set aside all laws but the King's will.

PYM.

If this rouse not the people up to rage,
And prop that fury with a stern resolve,
And gain the Parliament authority
To make itself coördinate with the Crown,
Nothing will do it, and our toil is vain.
To it—we'll to it at once ! And here in time
Comes, as I bade him, to this meeting-place
Of all our comrades, one whom we may use

As a far-flaming torch to light the fuel
So rankly heaped around. Good Master Patch,
I never felt so branded with the shame
Of failing strength and lamentable years.
The country dies apace, wanting one voice—
If only one—to rouse the sleepy spirit,
And spur the lagging veins of England's heart.

ST. JOHN.

Why here we've learnt a proof beyond all doubt—

PYM.

Myself have seen the writing with their names—

ST. JOHN.

The King and army bind themselves together
To march on London, and make good whate'er
The counsellors of the Court shall take in hand.

PYM.

They'll free Lord Strafford first.

ST. JOHN.

And every man
Who has been nobly known his country's friend—

PYM.

Good Master Patch, truly I grieve for you.

ST. JOHN.

—Will straight be hoisted on an Irish pike.

PYM.

Or hanged before the windows of Whitehall.

PATCH.

What, then, can nothing help us ?

PYM.

Why, yes, had we
The spirit of old Rome, much might be done.

ST. JOHN.

The people might be roused in time by words
Spoken with zeal, such as I've heard sometimes,
Though from one only—one whom, Master Patch,
I will not name.

PATCH.

Nay, they do say my tongue
Is sometimes worth another's sword. What then ?
Whate'er we have is but the gift of Heaven.

PYM.

Would that the people could but have the truth
Uttered, as he can round it who is dear,
Like their own eyes, to our best citizens.

ST. JOHN.

Raise but our voices till the passers by
Can hear us speak, and we shall have a crowd,
As if our words could change the pavement stones
To living men.

PATCH.

Sirs, let us try (*speaks louder.*) The King
No doubt would fain destroy the Parliament,
Set Strafford free, and chain the realm instead.

FIRST CITIZEN.

What is it these gentlemen say ? They speak of Strafford.

SECOND CITIZEN.

I know not, but we 'll listen. [*Exeunt Pym and St. John.*]

PATCH.

No doubt he would.
The Queen they say has asked for troops from Spain.
The Pope will send his priests, and by-and-bye
We shall be nothing but idolatrous dolts,
Asses and dogs, to do the work of devils.

SECOND CITIZEN.

Mark ! heard you that ? The Spanish troops are coming.

THIRD CITIZEN.

And priests from Rome to kill the truth of God.

FOURTH CITIZEN.

No doubt they 'll sail in fish-smacks up the Thames.

FIFTH CITIZEN.

Ay, and they 'll force us all to fast on fish
From Billingsgate : no beef from Smithfield more.

SIXTH CITIZEN.

What ! If the cavaliers are coming in
By Billingsgate and Smithfield, we must fight.
Here, boy, run fetch my sword and your own club.

FIRST CITIZEN.

I've got my pistol with me ; it will serve
To lame one courtier's dancing.

SECOND CITIZEN.

Sirs, what is it ?

Is Strafford broken loose ?

FIRST CITIZEN.

A curse on Strafford !

PATCH.

But what will cursing serve ? We must be men,
And do, not talk.

SECOND CITIZEN.

Ay, but what shall us do ?

THIRD CITIZEN.

Tell us, dear Sir, and we will try our best.

FOURTH CITIZEN.

I'm a poor man Sir, Diccon Strut of Lambeth,
But still I'm not afeared to fight for God.

THIRD CITIZEN.

No Sir, nor I. My wife Joan always tells me,

Says she, Sam take no thought upon thy life,
So thou canst save us from the bishops' claws.

PATCH.

What do, Sirs ? Nay, I know not. I 'll not say
That you should lift your clubs, and draw your swords.

FIRST CITIZEN.

Ay, but we 'll do it whether you say or no.

[*Swords drawn.*]

Think you that we 'll be slaves again to Charles
And his French Babylonish Madam ?

SECOND CITIZEN.

No.

Here is a club, that, though I say it Sir,
Will brain a knave, albeit he wears a mitre.
I 'm for the gospel sir, all for the gospel.
(*Cries heard.*) "No Strafford, and no Bishops ! Down
with all
Who are not friends to Parliament and Laws !"

PATCH.

In truth, my friends, I cannot say you nay.
I would not have a riot, but in truth
I cannot say that England 's not in danger.

CITIZENS.

In danger ! How in danger ?—tell us that.

FIRST CITIZEN.

I heard that they were going to fire the city.

PATCH.

I fear 'tis worse than that, though we must hope
That they will fail.

FIRST CITIZEN.

Worse than to burn the city!

PATCH.

Worse, friends—ay, ten times worse. The flames they
kindle

Are those of hell, not earth : falsehood and sin,
And shame, and drowning hopelessness of heart.
Why, if the city were on fire to-day,
As I'll not say, some secret villain's hate—

FIRST CITIZEN.

Ay, ay, some courtier.

SECOND CITIZEN.

Some sly Jesuit.

PATCH.

May not do that, we might escape with life,
And no dishonour. But 'tis this, my friends,
That makes us quake, and turns our strong hearts pale—
As vilely wan as if the guilt were ours—
That if the army, as they say 'twill soon—

SECOND CITIZEN.

The army !—Mark ! the army.

THIRD CITIZEN.

That's the danger.

PATCH.

In case the army marches down upon us,
And frees Lord Strafford—and they're bound to do it
By an agreement that the King has signed
With his own hand—it is not fire alone
And robbery of house that we must fear ;
But with Lord Strafford to put slaughter in them,
And all that barbarous Irish soldiery
Swarming about Whitehall, there's not a law—
The Parliament being dispersed, its members hanged,
Or, at the least, in gaol—will save your goods,
Your franchises, or lives ; there's not a door
Will keep your wives from shame.

CITIZENS (*a general groan*).

The Lord avenge !

PATCH.

We must avenge ourselves, or see the courtiers
And their hot ruffians do their nameless deeds,
Staining our homes and making us weep blood.

CITIZENS.

We'll have their's first. Whitehall ! on to Whitehall !

PATCH.

While we must eat our hearts, they will but mock,
And say a priest has given them absolution ;
And that, were we but Papists like themselves,
We too might laugh at sin, and be as they,
Bloody and filthy, yet secure of heaven.
But that the army will be here at once,
And then begin their work within an hour,
I cannot say.

CITIZENS.

O ! godless villany !

Enter VANE the Younger.

VANE.

Behold, my heart is as a steed broke loose,
When thus I see the children of the Lord
Make sharp their swords against the powers of hell !
And in the spirit and the strength of God,
I tell you that the morning hour is come
For which till now Creation all has groaned.
The hour of blood and tears, hate and dismay,
Wherein the Lord himself shall blaze from heaven,
And all his enemies be ground to dust.

On then, beloved ! and in the Gospel's might
Hew down the tyrants and idolaters,
And make earth clean for Him who soon shall reign.

CITIZEN.

Well said, sir, well ! may Heaven confound them all.
I say—you take me ?—burn me, sir, I say
I long to be within the Whitehall gates,
Drinking the Queen's French wine, and making love
To two or three of her young maids of honour.

PATCH.

I know not how 'twill be, but if the King
Rejects the bill for taking Strafford's head—

CITIZENS.

Reject ! he shall not.—Clubs, clubs !—Down with Strafford !

Whitehall !—on to Whitehall ! We'll storm the palace,
And hang the Queen's confessor—ay, the bishops !
No priests of Baal ! no slavery ! Strafford's head !

Enter Pym and St. John.

ST. JOHN.

They're fierce upon it now ; our work is done.
No man in England, nay, no child nor woman,
That will not think it scorn an English king

Should use a troop of cut-throat vagabonds
To make us feed upon his doles of favour,
Whose fathers lived and died as free by law.

PYM.

I've warned the guards ; the crowd will not break in,
But will sufficiently alarm the Court
To gain our purpose and secure the bill.
The signal's given ; the army-plotters, all,
I learn, have fled. Jermyn, in satin shoes
And fresh white velvet, perfumed curled and sleek
As from the Queen's own footstool, hurried forth,
Leapt upon horseback, and is gone for France :
And Lucy Carlisle and her brother Percy,
Have somehow made it clear at Court, Lord Holland
Betrayed the royal counsels. Thus my Lord,
Stript of his golden key and all his honours,
Hissed by the pages, hooted by the grooms,
And looking almost a plebeian rogue,
Is gone to hide his head at Kensington.

ST. JOHN.

At least he has served our turn. His coward cunning
Prepares for him in time a deeper fall,
If worse can be, than shame that no man pities.

CITIZENS.

Down, down with Strafford !—Have his head off straight !
On to Whitehall to look for Strafford's head !

SCENE—*A Room in the Tower.*STRAFFORD (*alone*).

The sun has climbed the archway of the skies,
And 'tis at length the broad and busy day.
How often have I seen it spread in glory
Above my native Wentworth's woods and glades,
Which, save in vision, I shall see no more.
Who knows ? I soon shall learn what of all living
There is not one on the round globe can tell.
Well, well, 'tis something even for the vanquished,
That all the hopeless wrestlings of the heart
Against the fate which overmasters us
Be stilled in deep unsearchable repose !
Yet even now my gorge would rise a little,
To think what shallow knaves have brought me down.
Not those fierce leaders of the Commons' House,
Who like true workmen do the work they chuse ;
But sarsnet lords, my brethren of the Peers.
Psha ! what are they or any now to me ?

I'd rather summon to my farewell hour
The shadows of the dead, the calm and stately,
Whose brains in quiet foreheads wrought untired ;
Who, pent like me within these mouldering walls,
Have found in them their final passage out
From the wide prison of this older world.
Grey Kings and Nobles of an elder time,
Whose bones have sunk to dust in bloody graves,
Ye rise around me all ! and hide the figures
Of those to-day's vain men I part from now.
In your pale circle, with your spectral arms,
Bending on gory neck your gazing heads,
Receive me, Shadows ! I am one of you ;
Thin but imperishable as yourselves.
For Strafford is no more a living man,
And he has nothing left upon the earth
But the dead load, that, like a porter tired,
He must throw down, and be—what none conceive.

Enter EVERARD.

EVERARD.

O ! my dear master !

STRAFFORD.

My good Everard,

How fares it with you, and with all my friends ?

EVERARD.

Alas! my Lord, how can your friends be well
When you are thus?

STRAFFORD.

Prithee no more of that;
There's other work to do than lamentation.
What hear, what mark you, in this world of ours
More than I knew of yesterday?

EVERARD.

My Lord,
This dense and dull old earth aches on for ever;
While we, slight children on her wrinkled breast,
Rage, laugh, go mad—lean dogs on death-fat graves.
All men believe the King will give this morning
His full consent.

STRAFFORD.

And I believe it too,
And what is more, I know it and can bear it.
It is to me but as the wondering tale,
Rehearsed by village gossips, of a fight
Wherein myself had been, and mark you, friend,
Had conquered, not been beaten. But say on;
How looked the people as you passed along?

EVERARD.

Dry forky sticks, staring with skeleton heads,

And jerked about as if grim nature dying
Clutched in her spasm the wires that move her puppets ;
Some dancing in their joy, some with strained brows
Full of a dismal questioning apprehension.
And two would talk before a barber's shop,
And, as they caught my foot behind them, turn,
Starting in fancy that they heard a Papist,
Come fresh from York to murder Protestants, '
And free Lord Strafford.

STRAFFORD.

Yes, I long have known

It is men's senselessness, and not their sense,
That makes them dangerous even to the wise.

EVERARD.

For forty years I've studied books and men,
But ne'er till these last days have known a jot
Of the true secret madness in mankind.
This morn the whispers leapt from each to each,
Like a petard alight, which every man
Feared might explode in his own hands, and therefore
Would haste to pass it onward to his friend :
And as the rumour spread, the prentices
Ran to their clubs ; the startled citizens

Each buckled on a sword, or charged a pistol,
And gathered towards Whitehall.

STRAFFORD.

Hampden and Pym
Brew vengeful philters, and make drunk with words,
That will not be slept off but in the grave.

EVERARD.

I caught fierce texts of scripture flying round,
Of woes on Moab, Ammon, Babylon :
And here and there some sad fanatic preacher,
In whom one saw, by glancing through the eyes,
The last grey curdling dregs of human joy,
Dropped sudden sparks that kindled where they fell :
While coarse goodwives, the fishwomen and wenches,
Looked at the holy man, as if their gaze
Grew rich, and his mere shadow on the mud
Spread liquid silver as hoar-frost around.

STRAFFORD.

Enough ; I see it. There is a high commotion,
That swells tow'ards Westminster. What was the word,
Let fall by Pym, that puffed so brave a storm ?

EVERARD.

There is much talk this morning of a plot

To bring the army from the north to London,
And use their swords against the Parliament.

STRAFFORD.

Ha ! ha !—no doubt—and in this earthquake's roll
The king will stand aghast, perhaps five minutes,
Then groan, and grasp his pen, and sign the bill :
The man who, had he hearkened when I spoke,
Had now been absolute monarch of these realms,
And I, through him, the ruler of them all !

EVERARD.

On such foundation built, my lord, your sway
Had proved, I fear, but an unstable tower.

STRAFFORD.

'Tis clear, at least, the pile is ground-flat now,
Though still the structure of my soul is firm.
So be it ; I would rather lose my head,
By the king's deed, than do his deed to save it.
But, Everard, we trifle thus too long.
I cannot see my children, but rejoice
That they are far from London, nor will know
What rage and fraud have overthrown their father,
Nor learn too soon for their ingenuous years
So sharp a lesson of distrust and dread.
Enjoin them all, and with most heed my son,

My honours' heir, my brave and glowing William,
That they forgive, as I do, every one
Who has contrived, or not opposed my death.
Say that I fall unjustly, for no wrong
The laws would punish with so dear a forfeit,
But that the frailties which I own to Heaven
Might well require of it a bitterer doom.
Tell him if ever in high place like mine,
He must not hate, nor must he love the people ;
Such hate is mad, such love is frivolous.
But for his own just sake, and not for theirs,
Let him desire their good, but not their praise.
Say it has ever been his father's mind
That perfect reason, justice, government,
Are the chief attributes of Him who made,
And who sustains the world, in whose full being,
Wisdom and power are one : and I, his creature,
Would fain have gained authority and rule,
To make the imagined order in my soul
Supreme o'er all, the proper good of man.
But Him to love who shaped us, and whose breast
Is the one home of all things, with a passion
Electing Him amid all other beings,
As if he were beside them, not their all—

This is the snug and dozing deliration
Of men, who filch from woman what is worst,
And cannot see the good. Of such beware.
This, and some matters else, I've written here.

[*Gives a paper.*]

But that which most concerns me they should know,
Will gain some added life from your true tongue,
And therefore you yourself shall tell it them,
E'en as I speak it now.

EVERARD.

Hark, my dear lord,
There is a rush of feet.

STRAFFORD.

I heard it not,
My thoughts were far from here. It brings, no doubt,
Word that the king has signed. It finds me ready.

Enter LADY CARLISLE *hurriedly, followed by* Guards.

LADY CARLISLE.

Blessings upon him—blessings ! O ! my lord,
All 's safe—the king refuses to consent—
You must be free to-day.

STRAFFORD.

No doubt I shall be.

LADY CARLISLE (*to the guards*).

My purse, go take it, and make merry all ;
Drink to King Charles's health and my Lord Strafford's.
Fire off your cannon ; hoist the royal flag,
And tell in triumph to the earth and skies
The King will not agree to Strafford's murder !
Off, knaves ! why stand you hesitating thus,
As if you doubted ? You'll, perhaps, have need
To hold some fight against the citizens,
Who will, I think, be mutinous. What then ?
The King commands—Strafford's your general,—
Strafford himself, in freedom and in arms.

STRAFFORD.

She's wild ; or, if her words have any substance,
I had prepared my soul for all but this.

LADY CARLISLE.

I mad ?—O no, not mad, except with joy.
I tell you that the King will not consent.
I was myself in his own ante-room,
When the Lord Treasurer, that good bishop Juxon,
Whom he had called to counsel—O ! good King,
To chuse a counsellor so saintly just—
Came forth from his long conference.

STRAFFORD.

And then ?

LADY CARLISLE.

Then, then—why then, plague on you ! then he told me,
Told me himself, the King was resolute,
He would not gratify the Parliament,
No not to save his crown, when his own conscience
Proclaimed to him the deed they ask is wrong.

[*Exit* EVERARD.]

STRAFFORD.

My Lord High Treasurer told you this himself ?
How strong the magic of a good man's voice
To rouse the sleeping goodness of mankind.

Enter three Courtiers.

FIRST COURTIER.

My Lord, I come to give your Lordship joy.

SECOND COURTIER.

My Lord, it could not be believed, but Truth
At last would conquer.

THIRD COURTIER.

I, my Lord, was always
Among your Lordship's well-wishers, although
I could not make your enemies hear my voice.

STRAFFORD.

Nor even myself. My worthy friends, I thank you,
But fear you will repent so quick a coming.
Virtue, when prudent, should not be in haste ;
It is not yet the end.

Enter EVERARD.

EVERARD.

O ! my loved Lord,
'Tis very true : they have it everywhere.
I never saw a people so cast down.

STRAFFORD.

That looks as if 'twere time for us to brighten.
But O ! dear Lady Carlisle, and my friend
Good Everard, all, I thought, was over now,
And life's long day of labour fairly done.
Thus there is more of wonder than of joy
In thinking I must lift the spade again,
And delve the soil on which I hoped to sleep,
And dream away the aching of my limbs.

Enter SIR W. BALFOUR.

SIR W. BALFOUR.

My Lord, a message from his Majesty.

Enter SIR DUDLEY CARLETON.

SIR DUDLEY CARLETON.

I grieve to be the bearer of bad news—

LADY CARLISLE.

O !

[Swoons, and is carried out.]

STRAFFORD.

All things are plain, and I 'm myself again.

SIR DUDLEY CARLETON.

But have it in command from our great Master
To tell his Lordship, that, by clear advice
Of many prelates and sage counsellors—

STRAFFORD.

Were my good friend the bold Lord Primate free,
And not as I, shut up in prison here,
Such, Everard, his counsel had not been.

SIR DUDLEY CARLETON.

With no dissentient but the Treasurer,
Whose scruples wiser men have thrust aside,
Commoved by the strong pressure of the times,
Which look to-day still angrier than before,
And weighing chiefly your good Lordship's letter,
Wherein you proffer to his Majesty
Your own advice to sanction your attainer,
And judging that no single subject's life—

EVERARD.

It were as well to speak all out at once.
The King believes it for his interest
To break his word, and therefore wills to do so.

STRAFFORD.

Dear Everard, peace ! for there is nothing here
I have not weighed before and made my own.

SIR DUDLEY CARLETON.

My Lord, you will not hold me culpable
That I report his Majesty's commands.
With piercing sorrow and remorse of heart,
And urged by painful care for England's good,
He has, my Lord, consented to the bill.

STRAFFORD.

The King, no doubt, does well. Offer my thanks
For this so gracious message from his mouth,
And pray yourself believe no thought of blame
To you or any man can haunt me now.—

Enter LADY CARLISLE.

And take, in token of good will, I pray you,
This diamond gem which a Queen gave to me.

SIR DUDLEY CARLETON.

My Lord, I—

[Takes the ring, and exit.]

STRAFFORD.

Everard, he dropt upon the stone a tear
More worth than all the jewels of the crown.

LADY CARLISLE.

O Strafford ! can your goodness pardon me
For my unblest insensate hastiness ?

STRAFFORD.

Not only pardon you, but thank you, lady,
For your true friendship shown me to the last.
Hark ! we can hear the shouting of the crowd ;
There go their guns and pistols, which they fire
To celebrate the certain death of Strafford !
But here's another nearer heavier sound.
Ho, Guard ! what noise is that I hear without ?

Enter Guard.

GUARD.

It is some carpenter at work, my Lord,
Something—I know not what—something, perhaps—

STRAFFORD.

If this poor fellow now were King of England,
I read such honesty in that dull face,
No scaffold would be built for me to-day.

Enter SIR W. BALFOUR.

SIR W. BALFOUR.

My Lord, I grieve to say, I've here the warrant.

STRAFFORD.

Nay, friends, why weep for one who has already
Paid the last tears that life demands of him?

[The tolling of a bell. LADY CARLISLE and EVERARD throw themselves before STRAFFORD, and grasp his hands. While he stoops over them the room fills with Soldiers, who surround and hide the group. The Soldiers move away again, and STRAFFORD and EVERARD are no longer seen; but LADY CARLISLE stands alone in an attitude of despair. When the last of the bystanders is gone, she says—

LADY CARLISLE.

Alone, henceforth for ever!

THE END.

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